A Complex Ethics: Critical Complexity, Deconstruction, and Implications for Business Ethics

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Declaration

By submitting this thesis/dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Abstract

This study commences with a critical, philosophical exploration of the ethical theories that constitute the normative basis of the dominant business ethics paradigm. It is argued that the universal and communitarian notions of the good upon which this paradigm is based, are inadequate in helping us deal with the complexities that define the modern day business environment. It is suggested that a sophisticated and affirmative account of postmodernism is a better suited alternative, as this paradigm is geared towards assisting us in finding workable solutions to our problems in the absence of universal truths or homogenous operating environments.

Although postmodernism serves as a useful starting point for challenging the normative basis of business ethics, this study moves beyond this broad paradigm in providing an analysis of both complexity theory (specifically critical complexity theory), and Jacques Derrida's deconstructive philosophy. The paradigm of critical complexity presents us with a useful framework for understanding, and thinking through the implications that complex phenomena hold for us, for our practices, and for our understanding of our responsibilities. Deconstruction (which serves as a philosophical example of a complex position) contributes to, and supplements this paradigm. Specifically, deconstruction draws attention to the processual nature of ethical decision-making and action, as well as to the ethical and political implications that arise from our limited knowledge of complex phenomena.

Once critical complexity theory and deconstruction are adequately defined, a close reading of a critical text on the relevance of Derrida for understanding business ethics is presented. In undertaking the close reading, a number of criticisms against deconstruction are addressed, and an argument is made for why a more complex understanding of ethics is preferable to universal or communitarian notions of the good – and, therefore, preferable as a normative basis for business ethics.

After making the case for a complex ethics, a general circumscription of a complex ethics is provided. This circumscription is premised on an understanding of ethics as a critical, provisional, transgressive, and imaginative enterprise. The specific implications that such a notion of ethics hold for teaching business ethics, and for understanding prominent business ethics themes (such as corporate social responsibility, responsible leadership, and sustainable development) are also elaborated upon.

In conclusion, it is argued that taking cognisance of the insights and implications that arise from this study will help to support the future viability of business ethics. This is because a complex understanding of ethics can promote the development of robust and flexible strategies, which are needed for dealing with the realities of the modern business environment.

Opsomming

Hierdie studie begin met ‘n kritiese, filosofiese ondersoek na die etiese teorieë wat die normatiewe basis van die dominante sake-etiek paradigma vorm. Daar word aangevoer dat die universele en kommunitaristiese idees van die goeie, waarop hierdie paradigma berus, onvoldoende is om ons in staat te stel om die kompleksiteite wat die hedendaagse sakeomgewing definieer sinvol te hanteer. Die voorstel word gemaak dat ’n gesofistikeerde en positiewe beskrywing van postmodernisme ’n meer gepaste alternatief is, omdat hierdie paradigma gerig is op werkbare oplossings vir ons probleme in die afwesigheid van universele waarhede of homogene werksomgewings.

Alhoewel postmodernisme as ’n nuttige vertrekpunt dien om die normatiewe basis van sake-etiek te bevraagteken, beweeg hierdie studie verby die breë paradigma deur ’n analise van beide kompleksiteitsteorie (meer spesifiek kritiese kompleksiteitsteorie), en Jacques Derrida se dekonstruktiewe filosofie aan te bied. Die paradigma van kritiese kompleksiteitsteorie verskaf aan ons ‘n nuttige raamwerk om komplekse verskynsels te verstaan, en ook om deur die gevolge wat kompleksiteit vir ons praktyke en ons begrip van ons verantwoordelikhede te bedink. Dekonstruksie (wat dien as ’n filosofiese voorbeeld van ’n komplekse posisie) dra by tot, en vul hierdie paradigma aan. Meer spesifiek fokus dekonstruksie ons aandag op die prosessuele aard van etiese besluitneming en optrede, sowel as die etiese en politieke implikasies wat uit ons beperkte kennis van komplekse verskynsels voortspruit.

Nadat kritiese kompleksiteitsteorie en dekonstruksie deeglik omskryf is, word ‘n kritiese teks oor die moontlike bydrae wat Derrida tot ons begrip van sake-etiek kan lewer noukeurig ontleed. Deur die loop van die ontleding word ’n aantal punte van kritiek teen dekonstruksie aangespreek, en ’n saak word uitgemaak dat ’n meer komplekse begrip van etiek verkieslik is bo universele en kommunitaristiese idees van die goeie – en dus meer geskik is as ’n normatiewe basis vir sake-etiek.

’n Algemene omskrywing van ’n komplekse etiek word ook verskaf om verdere steun te bied vir die verkieslikheid van so ’n opvatting van die etiek. Hierdie omskrywing is op die begrip van die etiek as ’n kritiese, provisionele, oorskryende, en verbeeldingsryke onderneming gebaseer. Die bepaalde implikasies wat hierdie idee vir onderrig in sake-etiek en ’n kennis van prominente sake-etiek temas (soos korporatiewe sosiale verantwoordelikheid, verantwoordelike leierskap, en volhoubare ontwikkeling) inhou, word aangespreek.

In die gevolgtrekkig word daar geargumenteer dat kennisname van die insigte en implikasies wat uit hierdie studie voortspruit die toekomstige lewensvatbaarheid van sake-etiek kan bevorder. Dit is omdat ‘n komplekse begrip van die etiek die ontwikkeling van robuuste en buigsame strategieë, wat nodig is vir die hantering van die realiteite van die moderne sakeomgewing, kan aanspoor.

Dedication

This study is dedicated to my husband, Sven Woermann. Thank you for being my bedrock and my friend, and for enabling me to achieve more than I would have been capable of achieving on my own.

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The real challenge to philosophy lies in how to access the complexity *of the experiences involved – which is in no way restricted to supplying natural knowledge – and how to access their* significance…

David Wood

A deconstruction of business ethics would encounter the difficulties of the aporias involved, and would uncover many more. Such an engagement is neither to accept nor reject business ethics, but rather to take it to its limits.

Campbell Jones (paraphrased)

The intelligence of complexity, isn't it to explore the field of possibilities, without restricting it with what is formally probable? Doesn't it invite us to reform, even to revolutionize?

Edgar Morin

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Part III: Implications

Introduction

1. Business ethics and the business landscape

The Enron case signifies a historical marker: whereas business ethics received little attention in the period prior to the Enron debacle, this debacle (along with other similar cases, including WorldCom) ushered in a new era of business ethics. Today there are very few MBA programmes that do not incorporate ethical and governance issues as part of their curriculum. Many professional bodies (such as the South African Institute for Chartered Accounting) have also mandated courses in ethics. Similarly, the institutionalisation of corporate governance has, in some instances, been the direct result of major corporate and accounting scandals, including Enron. The enactment of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act in the United States of America in 2002 serves as an example of the latter point. At face value, the focus on business ethics seems to be a positive development in the business world – one that can potentially restore public trust in business dealings.

However, seven-and-a-half years after Enron filed for bankruptcy, the world experienced the largest financial crisis since the Great Depression. The reasons for the crisis are complex, but one pertinent argument attributes the cause of the crisis to the unethical transferral of risk (in terms of loans, bonds and credit default swops) to parties who could not handle it (Boatright, 2009a). As in the Enron case, the belief was that everything would work out in the long run, but once systems began to fail, the house of cards imploded.

The world is still reeling from the aftermath of the crisis and the recession that followed, and much work must still be done in order to determine how we managed to find ourselves in such a situation. One thing, however, is certain: the recent focus on business ethics did very little to prevent the crisis. Leslie Maasdorp (2010), vice chairman of ABSA Capital and Barclays Capital, reports that several sessions were devoted both to rethinking business ethics, and to re-examining the structure of modern capitalism at the World Economic Forum, held in Davos in early 2010. She, however, did not experience these sessions as very fruitful, writing that: ‘I don't think anyone of us had high hopes of hearing new earth-shattering wisdom on this age old question of how to make the economic system of capitalism more fair and equal.’ From the evidence, it would appear that, thus far, business ethics has delivered a relatively minor contribution to addressing the issues with which the business world is currently grappling.

For those who take a more sober stance, this conclusion is perhaps not so surprising. The institutionalisation of business ethics was, in many instances, a knee-jerk reaction to the business and accounting scandals that rocked the business world in the late 1990s and early 2000s. No doubt it was implicitly assumed by some that institutionalising ethics would temper unethical behaviour in the business world. It is, however, highly debatable whether a university course in business ethics (for example) can have the same force as other socialisation and enculturalisation practices (such as religion). In other words, it is debatable whether institutionalising business ethics can significantly modify the moral behaviour of students. Instead of viewing business ethics in terms of its moralising influence, it is much more profitable and realistic to view the goal of business ethics as providing *sense-making tools* and *tools of analysis*[1] that can aid in ethical decision-making in the workplace.

Of the most powerful tools at the disposal of business ethicists are normative ethical theories. Writing within the economic context, John Maynard Keynes (1953: 306) states that: 'The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood… It is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good and evil.' The same argument applies to the business ethics context: the ideas of organisational theorists and moral philosophers are also more powerful than is commonly understood, since they constitute the conceptual paradigms and models according to which we understand ethics, and the work that ethics does in the world. As such, these ideas warrant attention. In the words of Stephen Linstead (2004a: 176): one needs to cultivate 'a passion *for the ideas themselves*', since without this passion 'we are not likely to have either the patience, the discipline, the respect or the simple love to discover the potential that they hold for us.' This study is, therefore, dedicated to critically exploring the ideas behind various theories, in order to discover the potential that they hold for the field of business ethics.

Before turning to a more detailed description of the goals of this study, it is useful to briefly illustrate Keynes's argument regarding the power of ideas. Specifically, we turn to an example of where theory has had a decisively negative impact on ethical behaviour in the business world, in order to reinforce the point that ideas can be used as instruments for encouraging not only good, but also bad, behaviour.

[1] In the context of this study, the term 'tool' refers not only to analytical strategies used to promote rational thought, but also creative strategies that promote critical self-reflection, moral imagination, and an ability to engage in complex thought. For a fuller analysis on the nature of tools, see the conclusion, section 3.

2. Bad theories are destroying good practices

In his article entitled, 'Bad management theories are destroying good management practices'; the late Sumantra Ghoshal (2005: 75) argues that 'we – as business school faculty – need to own up to our own role in creating Enrons. Our theories and ideas have done much to strengthen the management practices that we are all now so loudly condemning.' It is important to qualify that Ghoshal's argument pertains to management theories specifically – not normative ethical theories, which form the focus of this study. However, he, nevertheless, makes a compelling argument for why we should not blindly trust theory, in showing how business schools have – over the last thirty years – freed their students from any sense of moral responsibility by actively propagating ideologically-inspired amoral theories (76).

His reason for characterising management theories as amoral is because such theories constitute a 'pretence of knowledge' (von Hayek in Ghoshal, 2005: 76) based on the 'partialization of analysis, the exclusion of any role for human intentionality and choice, and the use of sharp assumptions and deductive reasoning' (Bailey & Ford in Ghoshal, 2005: 76-77). Ghoshal (2005: 79) attributes the amoral nature of management theories to the fact that such theories are 'overwhelmingly causal or functional in their models of explanation'. He (77) argues that morality or ethics is inseparable from some form of human intentionality. A precondition for transforming business studies into a science has, therefore, been the denial of ethical and moral considerations in business theories, and prescriptions for management practices. In this regard, he (79) references Milton Friedman's (1962) denial of any form of corporate social responsibility beyond profit-making as a prime example of the reductive tendencies in management theories. Ghoshal (2005: 79) argues that reductionism leads to the pretence of science in management practices, and offers the following example to illustrate the effects of this pretence:

> when managers, including CEOs, justify their actions by pleading powerlessness in the face of external forces, it is to the dehumanization of practice that they resort. When they claim that competition or capital markets are relentless in their demands, and that individual companies and managers gave no scope for choices, it is on the strength of the false premise of determinism that they free themselves from any sense of moral or ethical responsibility for their actions (79).

Amoral management theories are also often framed within a 'gloomy vision' (Hirschman, 1970 in Ghoshal, 2005: 77) of human nature. Ghoshal (2005: 76) argues that this gloomy vision is premised

on an ideology that 'is essentially grounded in a set of pessimistic assumptions about both individuals and institutions.' According to this gloomy vision, the main goal of social science is to restrict 'the social costs resulting from human imperfections' (76). Unlike physical phenomena, humans respond to theories, which claim to describe their nature. Ghoshal (77) provides the following example from Osterloh and Frey (2004), in order to illustrate this latter point: 'A theory that draws prescriptions on corporate governance on the assumption that managers cannot be trusted can make managers less trustworthy.' It is noteworthy that this criticism has also been raised against the draconian legislation upon which the Sarbanes-Oxley Act is based. In layman's terms this phenomenon is called a self-fulfilling prophecy. In academic terms, it is referred to as the double hermeneutic loop. Ghoshal (87) concludes this discussion, stating that:

> Excessive truth-claims based on extreme assumptions and partial analysis of complex phenomena can be bad even when they are not altogether wrong. In essence, social scientists carry an even greater social and moral responsibility than those who work with physical sciences because, if they hide ideology in the pretence of science, they can cause much more harm.

Ghoshal (87-88) admits that he alone does not have a substantive alternative to the ideological absolutism that characterises management theories. However, in order to formulate such an alternative, he (88) suggests that we – as academics and practitioners – should encourage intellectual pluralism. According to him (88), 'the social sciences, in general, and business schools, in particular, have lost their taste for pluralism'. The only way in which we can, however, 'temper the pretence of knowledge' is to:

> reengage with the scholarships of integration, application, and pedagogy to build management theories that are broader and richer than the reductionist and partial theories we have been developing over the last 30 years.

3. Is business ethics based on bad theory?

Kurt Lewin (1945: 129) argues that 'nothing is as practical as a good theory'. From Ghoshal's (2005: 86) analysis of management theories, we see that the converse also holds true: nothing is as dangerous as a bad theory. As such, it is important to critically examine the normative ethical theories commonly taught in business ethics, in order to ascertain whether these theories do, indeed, promote ethical business practices.

The goal of normative ethical theories is to provide guidance in answering the question 'how ought one to act, morally-speaking?' Different normative ethical theories can provide significantly different answers to this question, depending on the substantive and procedural assumptions upon which the theories are based. Two important questions are, therefore, what type of normative ethical theories informs our teaching and professional practices; and, are these theories conducive to helping practitioners make ethical decisions in the workplace?

A central premise of this study is that the ethical theories that constitute the normative tale commonly espoused in business ethics (namely, utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and virtue ethics), are marred by both substantive and procedural problems. This negatively affects the practical applicability of the normative tale. As such, the main goal of business ethics, i.e. providing tools of analysis to assist practical decision-making in the workplace, is severely undermined by the normative ideas commonly propagated in business ethics.

The problem of reductionism, to which Ghoshal (2005) alludes in his critical discussion on the ideologically-inspired theories that inform management practices, is also prevalent in the interpretation and application of the standard normative tale. All-too-often, it is assumed that definitions of what constitute the good can be easily determined by referring to pre-established categories (such as the promotion of happiness or the promotion of rationality); or, it is assumed that by following certain procedural guidelines, we will come to the 'right' answer. Such assumptions can only be supported on the grounds of certain reductive tendencies, whereby, for example, it is postulated that one's experiences have no effects on one's views of right or wrong[2], and that the past necessarily resembles the future (see Allen, 2000).

Furthermore, many theorists and practitioners also hold a 'gloomy vision' of human behaviour (Ghoshal, 2005), in that they believe that, when left to our own devices, we necessarily act in our own self-interest. On this interpretation, the goal of normative ethical theories is to move people from acting egoistically to acting altruistically (see Hattingh & Woermann, 2008). Both the reductive tendency, and the tendency to view human behaviour in terms of either other-motivated or self-motivated actions, is commonly advanced in business ethics. In this study it will be argued that such assumptions cannot account for the complex nature of human life, both in terms of who we are, and in terms of how we act. Furthermore, this study supports Ghoshal's (2005: 87) conclusion that 'excessive truth-claims based on extreme assumptions and partial analysis of complex phenomena can be bad even when they are not altogether wrong.'

[2] This example does not apply to virtue ethics.

4. Engaging with other ideas

In order to address this problem, it is, indeed, necessary to foster a taste for pluralism (as advocated by Ghoshal). To this end, it is hypothesised that it may be useful to search for other ideas concerning the nature of ethics – both in the field of philosophy, as well as further afield. This study is, therefore, transdisciplinary in nature, in that an attempt is made 'to think together' a number of different paradigms in order to both 'expose, challenge and problematise the underlying assumptions that inform conventional theories and practices' (Preiser & Cilliers, 2010: 276) and 'to ask new and different questions about what forms of intervention we should pursue' (Midgley, 2003: 93).

This transdisciplinary agenda is supported by studies that acknowledge that social systems and organisations are complex (Preiser & Cilliers, 2010: 276). An important set of ideas that can help to achieve the aims of this study, therefore, come from the complexity literature (and the literature that influenced the development of complexity theory). Indeed, Peter Allen (2000: 29) notes that, within the management and policy context, the science of complexity provides 'an integrated, multidimensional approach', which leads to advice that can 'be related successfully to the real-world situation.' However, Allen (29) also warns that 'this may indeed spell the limits to knowledge and turn us from the attractive but misleading mirage of prediction.' This is because – as will be elaborated upon in this study – complexity theory emphasises the dynamic, non-linear, spatial, and temporal relations between nodes in a system. Applied to social systems, this means that our behaviour cannot be analysed in terms of predicable causal outcomes, or in terms of fixed, binary categories such as 'good' and 'evil'. In exploring complexity, one is soon led to the conclusion that our traditional moral categories are in need of serious revision, if they are to be successfully related to real-world situations. To this end, complexity theory provides us with an important set of ideas for rethinking the definition and role of ethics in today's business world.

A central challenge in this study is to show *how* a complex ethics is conducive to helping practitioners make ethical decisions in the workplace. One of the main 'benefits' of the standard normative tale (as it is often interpreted in business ethics textbooks) is that it offers a rule or compliance-based model to ethics, in which categorically-binding principles, codified knowledge, a communitarian understanding of ethics, or strict procedures are put forward as some of the main tenets of these theories. These tenets provide one with the 'mirage of predictability', which for many, remains preferable to a complex view of ethics that resists institutionalisation. In order to address this challenge, this study also draws heavily on the deconstructive philosophy of Jacques

Derrida. Derrida is deeply concerned with problems related to the naturalisation of conceptual paradigms, and the negative consequences that arise when we view our reductive models as corresponding with reality.

Through a close reading (undertaken in chapter five), it is shown not only that a deconstructive ethics is an example of a complex ethics, but that Derrida's philosophy provides a radical challenge to business ethics, and thereby allows us to ask new questions that, with time, can lead to a broader, richer, and more productive interpretation of business ethics. The complexity theorist, Edgar Morin (2008: 56) argues that we must abandon the programmes and solutions that have worked in the past, and instead invent new strategies for the future. Derrida's philosophy suggests such a strategy, and although it cannot lead us back to the comfort of moral predictability, it does help us to 'unclose closed matters', as so beautifully described by Alain Badiou (2009: 138); and, thereby to start the patient, disciplined, respectful, and loving investigation (Linstead, 2004a) of what ethics might mean for a conception of business that tries to account for the many complex ways in which we relate with one another and with the world.

Badiou (2009: 132) writes that for Derrida, the word 'deconstruction' 'was an indication of a speculative desire, a desire for thought. A basic desire for thought.' In this study, it is argued that, in order for business ethics to be a viable field that can positively influence the business world, business ethicists must forego their complacency, and engage in thought. Business ethics, as a subject and as a practice, cannot be restricted to merely repeating and applying the moral precedents established in the history of philosophical ethics. The world is experiencing an increase in the number of political, social, and environmental crises, for which our currents tools of analysis (including our standard normative ethical theories) are inappropriate.

Indeed, the recent recession revealed the cracks in the capitalistic landscape, characterised by vested interests and political power. Many would agree that now is the time to sow the seeds of new ideas, in the hope that these may grow, take shape, and blossom in the cracks. In this regard, this study could be considered as one such a seed.

5. The way forward

In focusing on the potential that certain ideas hold for the field of business ethics, this study constitutes a philosophical work. The business ethics context is referred to in order to illustrate the consequences that our theories and ideas hold for thinking about the ethics of our business practices.

These consequences are explored in terms of implications for conceptualising the field of business ethics, as well as for teaching business ethics.

The study commences in three parts. In the first part of the study – chapters one and two – the problem statement (i.e. that the traditional interpretation of the standard normative tale is bad for business ethics) is elaborated upon, and an alternative tale (based on the insights of postmodern philosophy) is introduced and evaluated. Both these chapters focus strongly on the way in which the standard normative tale and postmodernism[3] is interpreted in the field of business ethics (and organisational studies) specifically. Chapter two concludes with a discussion of the three tenets of an affirmative postmodernism that emerged from the analysis, and the implications that these tenets hold for thinking about the ethical task. These three tenets, namely that limited knowledge is not 'any' knowledge, that ethics implies choice and performative reflexivity, and that ethics is a contextually-defined practice, can also be argued for from the perspective of complexity theory or deconstruction. As such, chapter two should be read as a general introduction to the more specific, and detailed, discussions to follow. In drawing on critical complexity theory and deconstruction, this study moves beyond postmodernism (and the implication that postmodernism holds for business ethics).

The second part of the study – chapters three, four, and five – constitutes an exercise in theory-building, with the aim of rethinking the normative basis of business ethics. Here, it is shown why a complex, deconstructive ethics is preferable to the standard normative tale. In chapter three, the paradigm of complexity, specifically critical complexity[4], is elaborated upon. In order to contextualise this paradigm, some of the main influences on the development of critical complexity theory are also investigated. At the end of the chapter, the three 'postmodern tenets' are revisited and explored in terms of the further implications that emerged from the discussion on complexity theory. What is clear from this analysis is that mechanisms are needed, which can help us to continually challenge and transform our conceptual paradigms (Allen, 2000: 10).

In chapter four, the theory of deconstruction (supported by the Derridean terms of supplement, play, *différance*, and trace) is explained in detail. Here, it is demonstrated that a deconstructive ethics is

[3] There are many different interpretations of postmodernism. In this study, a broad distinction is drawn between sceptical postmodernists (who support relativism and positions that verge on nihilism) and affirmative postmodernists (who show a healthy temperance in trying to find working solutions in the absence of universal truths) (Kilduff & Mehra, 1997: 455). This study builds on an affirmative view of postmodernism. For a more detailed discussion on the difference between these positions, see chapter two, sections 1 and 5.2.

[4] Complexity theory is subject to various interpretations. In this study, the view of critical complexity is subscribed to. See the introduction to chapter three, for a brief overview of what this view entails.

based on ‘a recursive modality’ or ‘an always renewable openness’ (Wood, 1999: 117). As such, deconstruction provides us with an important ‘mechanism’ for continually evaluating and transforming our systems of meaning. The recursive nature of the deconstructive enterprise also implies that the ethics of deconstruction cannot be captured in categorical principles or rules. It is, therefore, not possible to explain the ethics of deconstruction in terms of a number of substantive points, since the theory is process-orientated, rather than content-orientated. A hallmark of complexity theory is that it is also processual in nature, in that emphasis is placed on the dynamic, non-linear relations between components of a system, rather than the system itself. As such, one can interpret the deconstructive enterprise as an example of a complex position. Therefore, in exploring the ethics of deconstruction, a number of important insights emerge as to what a complex ethics might entail.

Since a deconstructive ethics cannot be neatly summarised in a number of fixed premises, a more fruitful way of further discovering what it might entail is by bringing deconstruction into conversation with a position that is compatible with the conception of ethics espoused in the standard normative tale. This is achieved in chapter five, in which a close reading is presented of a text by the business ethicist, Richard De George (2008), in which he criticises Campbell Jones’s (2007) deconstructive reading of the notion of corporate social responsibility. De George’s text, however, also launches a larger attack on Derrida’s philosophy, in that he argues that the categories made available in Derrida work confound, rather than add to the field of business ethics. Through means of the close reading, one is, therefore, able to demonstrate what the ethics of deconstruction (which also serves as an example of a complex ethics) entails. Such an ethics provides a radical challenge to the standard approach to business ethics issues, such as corporate social responsibility. In this analysis the differences between a critical and complex ethics (of which deconstruction serves as an example) and an ethics based on assumptions regarding a common human morality become clear.

Together, part one and part two serve to show both why the standard interpretation of the normative tale does not provide a sound basis for business ethics, as well as why deconstruction and complexity theory can greatly benefit the field by providing accounts of ethics that are more conducive to dealing with real-world business problems. In part three – chapters six and seven – the theoretical and practical implications that a complex, critical view of ethics hold for our understanding of ethical categories, will be elaborated upon. In chapter six, the idea of a complex ethics is unpacked in terms of appropriate ethical models, the embeddedness of our ethical practices, and the critical task (which is characterised as a transgressive, ironic, and imaginative

activity). Through this analysis, certain implications arise for our understanding of moral responsibility and awareness, tolerance and openness, and ethical strategy development. In chapter seven, the challenge that a complex ethics poses for our understanding of traditional ethical values is illustrated at the hand of 1) the implications that a complex ethics holds for conceptualising prominent business ethics themes, such as corporate citizenship; sustainable development; and responsible and effective leadership; and, 2) the challenges and implications that a complex view of ethics holds for the traditional understanding of business ethics, and for the possibility of teaching business ethics.

With regard to the value that affirmative postmodern ideas hold for business ethics, Linstead (2004a) writes: 'We have scratched the surface, and we have found something – but there is so much more to discover.' By building on, and moving beyond these postmodern ideas, the complexity and deconstructive insights developed in this study will hopefully present the reader with some small discoveries regarding what business ethics could become!

Part I:
Introducing the Argument

Chapter 1

The Normative Tale of Business Ethics

1. Introduction

As stated in the introduction, one of the goals of this study is to critically evaluate the normative tale commonly presented in the business ethics literature. This normative tale consists of three dominant strands or perspectives, namely utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and virtue ethics. These theories will be presented and critiqued in this chapter. The critique will focus on the substantive and procedural claims made in these theories, as well as on the implications that these theories hold for the teaching and practice of business ethics. The goal of the chapter is to draw attention to the urgent need to re-evaluate the type of normative tale presented to business ethics students and practitioners. In subsequent chapters, it will be specifically argued that, in order for business ethics to be a viable field that can have a positive and sustainable impact on the corporate environment, business ethicists should take cognisance of the developments in postmodern philosophy (specifically deconstruction), and complexity theory (specifically critical complexity). The normative implications of deconstruction and critical complexity lead to a more robust, flexible, modest, and complex understanding of ethics, which – as will be argued – is more suited to dealing with the contemporary challenges facing business today. However, as stated, the focus of this chapter is specifically on the standard normative tale, and the practical implications that this tale holds for ethical decision-making in business.

The analysis will begin by placing the standard normative tale in context. To this end, the normative or prescriptive field of business ethics will be briefly compared with the empirical or descriptive field of business ethics. Next, the normative ethical theories will be introduced, followed by a critical analysis of the substantive content of these theories. After introducing and evaluating the ethical theories, the standard depictions of these theories in the business ethics literature will be evaluated. The evaluation is undertaken in order to determine the perceptions regarding ethical decision-making that such depictions create in the minds of business students. In the last part of the analysis, the challenges that exist in applying these theories in practice are identified and discussed. The chapter concludes with some general comments regarding the status of the standard normative tale, and the way forward.

2. A tale of two cities

At a seminar I recently attended, the speaker stressed the indefinite article used to characterise the tale he wished to tell about pragmatism. '*A* tale' as opposed to '*the* tale' lays emphasis on the myriad interpretations that can be ascribed to any field of study, and business ethics is no exception. According to the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy[5], the field of business ethics is roughly four decades old. Ten Bos (1997: 1006; 1007), however, contends that the field only emerged as an organised discipline in the early 1980s[6] with the establishment of the first journal on business and organisational ethics (*Journal of Business Ethics*), founded in 1981. Over the last three decades, interest in the field has grown in response to the apparent decline in ethical standards in business, and in recognition of the fact that economic relations are premised on normative grounds that need protecting (Keleman & Peltonen, 2001: 152). However, these responses have been far from unanimous, since, as the field has grown in popularity, so too have the diversity of responses (by philosophers, social scientists and management practitioners) to these issues. The fragmentation in the field is so pronounced that some theorists (see Linda Trevino and Gary Weaver (1994)) have questioned whether it would not be better to divide 'business ethics' into two separate fields.

Roughly speaking, the argument put forth by Trevino and Weaver (113-115) is that academic business ethics is divided into a normative/prescriptive interpretation usually offered by philosophers or theologians; and an empirical/descriptive/predictive interpretation usually put forth by social scientists, management consultants, or business school academics. Whereas the former interpretation stresses ethics above business, the latter places emphasis on business above ethics. Although one should be weary of an over-simplification of these interpretations, one could state that – in broad terms – the fissure between these interpretative categories is marked by a difference in meta-theoretical assumptions that guide the theories and norms originating from these disciplines. Briefly stated, the normative field is concerned with judging and justifying behaviour as ethically right or wrong, whereas discussion within the descriptive field is limited to questions concerning epistemology and methodology, and critical faculties are focused on determining ethical yardsticks (Willmott, 1998: 79).

[5] See 'Business Ethics' in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Available online at: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-business/ Published April 16, 2008.

[6] Although business ethics exists as a field in its own right, there has also been a focus on business ethics issues in the fields of organisation studies, management sciences, and leadership studies. The reasons for the import of ethics in these fields are: 1) An increased recognition of the importance of ethical issues (such as equal opportunity policies, disability and ethnicity issues, social cost accounting, environmental responsibility, corporate governance, whistle-blowing, ethical marketing, etc.); 2) A cultural or humanist turn that replaces blind rule-following; and, 3) A renewed focus on worthwhile ends (as opposed to the mere development of social technologies) as the *raison d'etre* of these studies (Parker, 1998a: 3-4).

Despite conflict between these two interpretative categories, Trevino and Weaver (1994: 114) contend that, rather than witnessing a collapse in the field, the two streams are becoming more institutionalised and entrenched. Indeed, this observation has been confirmed over the last sixteen years, since the publication of their article. The house divided is, therefore, turning into a tale of two cities! Along these lines, Parker argues that the field is best charaterised by Lyotard's (1988) term, *agon*, which 'refers to the wrestling match between incommensurable language games' (Parker, 1998b: 284). In the case of business ethics, the clash between the normative and descriptive interpretations can be crudely set-up as idealism versus realism, or (in metaphorical terms) the ivory tower meets the law of the jungle[7] (283). Below follows a brief (and more academic!) description of the characteristics that define the normative and descriptive fields of business ethics:

2.1. The normative field of business ethics

The normative approach – which focuses on what ought to be the case – is interdisciplinary in nature, drawing from 'philosophy, theology, political and social theory, and other self-consciously critical inquiries' (Trevino & Weaver, 1994: 114). Although Trevino and Weaver (114) concede that the normative task is not only prescriptive in nature, but also involves analysis and description; they, nevertheless, identify the formulation of prescriptive moral judgements as the dominant feature of the normative approach. The normative approach is, therefore, 'unashamedly value-driven' (116).

Although the task of formulating these moral prescriptions is not specified by any research methodologies (as is the case in the social sciences), there is, nevertheless, methodological self-consciousness, which individuates to the task at hand, and which can be described 'by a small number of heuristic guidelines' (116). Whilst the philosophical methodology lacks specificity, the philosophical lexicon is well-developed, having been refined over centuries of philosophical and ethical study (118). For example, the term 'ethical behaviour' refers to behaviour which is right, just

[7] Trevino and Weaver (1994: 113) provide the following two, slightly overstated, vignettes to illustrate the attitude that normative and descriptive business ethicists have towards each other. The context for these vignettes is a conference in business ethics, where people affiliated with the field of business ethics meet to share their work with one another:

> *Business school faculty member*: 'These philosophers don't seem to know much about business. Their papers are full of mumbo jumbo that no one else can understand, least of all business managers. What does this tell us about management in the real world, anyway? I'd like to be a fly on the wall when they attempt to deliver these incomprehensible abstractions to the local Chamber of Commerce.'
>
> *Philosopher:* 'Oh no, a panel discussion by business school faculty on employee theft. Someone will probably talk about the relationship between authorized paper clip acquisitions and variations in office lighting, holding moonlight constant, of course. Big deal! That won't improve anyone's character, nor give the genuinely puzzled a guide for moral living, It's no surprise, though; they really haven't studied ethics.'

or fair – each of which, in turn, has its own history. In order to determine whether these terms are understood and used correctly, a significant amount of conceptual clarification precedes the actual formulation of moral prescriptions or judgements (120). According to Trevino and Weaver (120), this meta-ethical task is exemplified in the debate over the ontological status of organisations (i.e. are organisations moral agents to which we can attribute moral responsibility and blame?).

Apart from this meta-ethical task, the purpose of normative business ethics is to evaluate the propriety of the corporate world, and to prescribe morally better alternatives (120). These morally better alternative are encapsulated in moral standards or principles, which are derived from normative ethical theories. Standards and principles present abstract, ideal cases, against which real actions can be critiqued and evaluated (120). In other words, normative business ethicists, in specifying what ought to be the case, are more concerned with the instantiation of a moral principle, than with the causal antecedents of an action (120).

Opinions differ as to how moral principles should be applied to business problems, but it is generally accepted that normative ethical theories provide us with the tools necessary to undertake an analysis and informed discussion of ethical issues that arise in the business context (121). Furthermore, opinions also differ regarding which principles should be applied to resolve business ethics problems. Generally, however, MacIntyre's (1984) circumscription of applied ethics as containing two elements is accepted. These two elements are 'context-neutral (i.e. putatively universal) ethical theory, and context-sensitive discussions of particular ethical issues' (Trevino & Weaver, 1994: 121). Deciding upon which normative theory to apply to a given business ethics issue depends on whether a given theory is more 'correct', useful, or well-founded than contesting theories (124).

According to Trevino and Weaver (121), the scope of normative ethical theory 'concerns morality as such i.e., a standard of moral reasoning which holds for persons qua persons.' It is assumed that moral persons or agents – who have to make choices in practical contexts – freely and responsibly decide whether to act in accordance with the moral standards espoused in these normative theories (118; 122). Therefore, because moral agents are rational and autonomous, 'moral action is self-explanatory or self-interpreting in character, needing no additional explanation in causal or nomological terms' (119). The explanation for ethical behaviour lies between the dictates of morality and an agent's actions (119).

Thus, in a nutshell, one can state that the 'method' of ethical theory (as defined by Rawls (1971)) involves achieving a 'reflective equilibrium between theoretical constructions and our considered moral judgments' (Trevino & Weaver, 1994: 122).

2.2. The descriptive field of business ethics

In contrast to the normative approach, social scientists who employ the descriptive approach – which Trevino and Weaver (1994: 114) identify most strongly with the functionalist paradigm – attempt to elucidate what is the case. Such a goal is premised on an objective view of the world, as well as a managerial orientation geared towards stability, as opposed to change (114-115). In order to define, explain, and predict phenomena in an organisational context, social scientists make use of design criteria and quantitative statistical methods to test the validity of hypotheses. Historical analysis, observation, interviews, surveys and experiments are also used as methodological tools in the descriptive approach (117).

Compared to the normative approach, the ethical vocabulary employed by the social scientist is quite young. As a result, key ethical terms are used loosely, to refer to different things in different contexts (119). For example, in the language of the social scientist, 'ethical behaviour' does not necessarily refer to behaviour that is *a priori* characterised as good, right, or deserving of respect, but can represent any behaviour exhibited by individuals facing ethical decisions (118). In this example, the term 'ethical behaviour' can be used descriptively, and also accounts for the external determinants that impact upon individual behaviour (118).

Most social scientists ascribe to Bandura's (1986) viewpoint of reciprocal causation, where ethical or unethical behaviour is the outcome of both individual and environmental factors, which mutually influence each other (Trevino & Weaver, 1994: 119). Social scientists, in emphasising multiple determinants of human behaviour, find it difficult to reconcile ethical behaviour with moral free will. Moreover, although conceptions of individual responsibility and autonomy are not negated in this paradigm, external determinants (such as reward systems, the visibility of business ethics tools etc.) are viewed as more interesting subjects of study, as these are factors that can be controlled and manipulated (119 -120).

Complex organisational behaviour is described with reference to social scientific theory, which 'provides a conceptual basis for examining regularities and relationships that can lead to generalizations about organizational behavior – to describe, explain and or predict specific

outcomes of interest to the researcher' (121). Social scientific theory, therefore, forms the theoretical basis for managing the ethical behaviour of individuals and organisations. Hypothesised causal factors are informed by 'the social scientific roots of the investigator' (122) and empirical research is undertaken to determine the strength and influence of causal factors (119).

The descriptive approach is empirically-based, and theory is built incrementally and deductively by testing hypotheses against organisational phenomena and behaviour, in order to determine the explanatory or predictive success of a given theory (123). The extent to which these theories help managers to deal with, and predict, ethical problems is used as the criterion for evaluating the success of a given theory.

2.3. Evaluating the two fields of business ethics

It is important to again reiterate that the above categorisation offers a very simplistic overview of the normative and descriptive approaches to business ethics. Indeed, Trevino and Weaver (1994: 114) warn that both 'approaches are admittedly more complex and less unified' than their discussion suggests. Added to this caveat, is the fact that, although the above distinctions are useful in plotting the field(s) of business ethics, the fissure that divides these two approaches is also not as absolute as one is led to believe by the above analysis, and by Martin Parker's comment concerning the *agon*. Indeed, whilst it is true that philosophers generally focus on moral agency or abstract moral principles as the main determinate of responsible action, contextual factors (as propagated in the empirical approach) are also taken into consideration in some of the context-based normative theories. Conversely, although the main focus of social scientists is on external determinants that influence ethical behaviour, internal determinants (such as locus of control, cognitive development, and moral psychology) are also often considered when describing, explaining, or predicting moral behaviour.

Additionally, despite the fact that social scientists work with concrete social phenomena, their approach is (as stated), nevertheless, informed by the scientific roots of the investigator – be it psychology, sociology, management theory, scientific management etc. Although the social scientist applies her body of theoretical knowledge to specific field experiments, the initial hypotheses are (like with the normative approach) often based on abstract, theoretical postulates regarding human behaviour. In other words, because there is no common understanding of what a human being is, descriptions cannot be innocent of theoretical prejudice (Parker, 1998a: 2). Philosophers do not do field experiments to test their hypotheses, but their reliance on illuminating

cases and examples to elucidate desirable/undesirable moral behaviour and principles, also suggests that the normative approach is not always as abstract as one is led to believe. Nevertheless, despite these warnings, the categorisation still offers a useful distinction for plotting the field(s) of business ethics.

In chapter two (sec. 3), it will be shown that the distinction between the normative and the descriptive approaches rests on a problematic assumption regarding our ability to justify our conceptual models on either epistemological or ontological grounds. However, the focus of the remaining part of this chapter will be on the normative approach. One of the reasons for choosing to focus on the normative approach is because most business ethics textbooks and courses have a strong normative component. Indeed, the business ethics course mandated for undergraduate accounting students by the South African Institute for Chartered Accountants (SAICA) not only includes a section on normative ethical theories, but also on value systems (SAICA, 2005). However, a more prominent reason for focusing on the normative approach concerns the goal of this study, namely: to critically explore the ideas behind various normative theories, in order to discover the potential that they hold for business ethics specifically (see intro., sec. 1).

3. The standard normative tale: introducing the ethical theories

As stated above, Trevino and Weaver (1994: 118) argue that social scientists often understand ethics descriptively. However, most definitions of business ethics are derived from definitions of ethics, and, therefore, have a normative orientation. In philosophy, ethics is commonly defined as the study of what constitutes right and wrong, good and bad, and what deserves respect and what does not. In other words, 'ethics is the attempt to build a systematic set of normative prescriptions about human behaviour, codes to govern everyday morals and morality' (Parker, 1998a: 1). From this definition it follows that the question 'Is it ethical?' represents an attempt 'to render a matter accountable by emphasizing or privileging the relevance of moral criteria rather than some other measure, such as feasibility or effectiveness' (Willmott, 1998: 76). Business ethicists extend and apply this definition to human conduct in the business context (Shaw, 2008: 5). De George (2006: 23) provides an even broader definition of business ethics, stating that the field as such 'is defined by the interaction of ethics and business. Business ethics is as national, international, or global as business itself, and no arbitrary geographical boundaries limit it.' If one concedes that every business decision has a normative dimension, then it stands to reason that the topics covered in business ethics are as broad as business itself.

Despite the fact that the broad normative dimension of business decisions will receive a lot of attention in the following chapters, what is of interest at present is the specific normative ethical theories that are commonly employed in business ethics, in order to differentiate between ethically right and wrong actions. The three most common theories presented in standard business ethics textbooks and readers are utilitarianism, Kantian ethics and virtue ethics. Together, these three theories form what is referred to as 'the standard normative tale' in the context of this study[8].

Before investigating how the standard normative tale is applied in business ethics, it is necessary to unpack the substantive claims of utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and virtue ethics (sec. 3.1.), as well as to provide a critical evaluation of these three normative ethical theories (sec. 3.2.). In terms of the substantive claims, it must be noted that section 3.1. only presents a very brief circumscription of the three ethical theories. This overview is based on the presentation of these theories in standard business ethics textbooks[9] (for examples see Shaw, 2008; De George, 2006; Boatright, 2009b; Velazquez, 2006; Rossouw et al., 2009; Fisher and Lovell, 2009), and should not be read as a sophisticated philosophical exposition of these three positions.

3.1. Overview of the normative ethical theories

3.1.1. Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is an example of consequentialism, which, in contrast to Kantian ethics and virtue ethics, means that the morality of one's actions is a function of the consequences that result from these actions. The different types of consequentialist positions can be defined by asking the question: 'consequences for whom?' Three broad consequentialist strands can be identified, namely: egoism (consequences for myself); altruism (consequences for others); and, utilitarianism (consequences for everyone affected by an action). Out of the three strands, utilitarianism is presented as the most common guiding normative theory in the applied ethics literature.

[8] The scope of the normative tale presented in this study does not exhaust the discussion of normative ethical theories within business ethics. Many textbooks also provide social contract or pragmatic approaches to business ethics. Within specific business ethics topics, such as distributive justice, additional normative theories such as the deontological approach of John Rawls (1971), or the libertarian approach of Robert Nozick (1974) are also often discussed. The standard normative tale depicted within the context of this study should, therefore, be read as the minimal requirements for understanding a normative approach to business ethics.

[9] Although some textbooks such as De George (2006) describe the normative ethical theories in more detail than presented in the following section; others such as Rossouw, du Plessis, Prinsloo, and Prozesky (2009) provide more or less the same depth of coverage. Most of the textbooks also discuss some of the advantages and disadvantages associated with the normative ethical theories, as well as make reference to how these theories can be applied in the business context.

Utilitarianism has its roots in Jeremy Bentham's hedonistic calculus. Bentham (2001: 87) maintained that pain and pleasure alone can 'point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do.' Pain and pleasure thus become the sole determinant of morality, and the moral rule amounts to maximising pleasure and minimising pain for the greatest number of people affected by one's actions (this idea is expressed in the 'Greatest Happiness' principle). John Stuart Mill's (1863) utilitarian position sought to refine Bentham's crude calculus, by ranking pleasure and pain according to their importance in allowing for human actualisation and maximum societal utility. However, despite this refinement, utilitarianism remains a highly rationalistic project, whereby moral beings behave 'as if they were machines valuing logic over everything else' (Jones, Parker & ten Bos, 2005: 39).

A further distinction that is often drawn is between rule and act utilitarianism: whereas act utilitarians judge the morality of the action by the specific consequences that an act holds for those affected by the action, rule utilitarians try to identify certain rules, which, if followed by everyone, would lead to the greatest amount of societal welfare. The difference between these two types of utilitarianism, therefore, concerns the object of calculation (50-51): namely, the specific or the general case.

Regardless of the object of calculation, certain factors need to be considered when undertaking a calculation (Shaw, 2008: 69-71): i) One must not only focus on pleasure, happiness or utility; but also on pain, unhappiness and disutility. In other words, in situations where one will experience equal happiness or utility, one must choose that situation, which can be realised with the least amount of unhappiness or disutility. ii) The focus of a utilitarian calculation is on the units of happiness/unhappiness or utility/disutility – not on the amount of people. People may be affected to different degrees by a certain action and this should be considered. Utilitarian calculation is not democratic in the sense of one person, one unit. What is of importance is the degree of happiness/utility or unhappiness/disutility experienced by the various parties affected by a decision. iii) Almost anything can, in principle, be morally right in a particular context. iv) When attempting to maximise happiness or utility, long term effects should also be considered. v) One must always aim to maximise happiness. vi) One's own happiness/utility and unhappiness/disutility must also be factored into the calculation. By taking the above features into account, one can successfully perform a utilitarian calculation, and, thereby, ascertain the morally-correct course of action in any given situation.

3.1.2. Kantian ethics

In contrast to utilitarianism, Kantian ethics is an example of a deontological ethics, where the morality of one's actions is not determined by the consequences, but by whether the actions are *a priori* defined as morally required, forbidden, or permitted. According to the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy[10], '[t]he word deontology derives from the Greek words for duty (deon) and science (or study) of (logos).' This study of moral obligation lies at the heart of Kantian ethics. Immanuel Kant's interest in duty may very well be ascribed to the influence of 18th century German Protestantism, which placed duty at the centre of ethics (Norman, 1998: 70).

For Kant (1993: 7), nothing is good in itself except goodwill. As such, moral evaluations must be focused on our intentions rather than the consequences of our actions, and these intentions must be grounded in a sense of duty (as an expression of goodwill), as opposed to feelings or inclinations. Our duty is, furthermore, founded in reason which is completely free from contingencies. Duty, for Kant, is abstract and formal and, therefore, contains no empirical content (10-12). From this circumscription of goodwill and duty, Kant formulates the moral law, which is legislated and sanctioned by pure reason. Such a law constitutes a universal *a priori* principle, and the universality of the principle is derived from rationality. This is because a universal principle, based on pure reason, requires that one must follow any law as if all rational beings should follow it. According to Kant, only one such a law exists, namely the categorical imperative. In other words, if we concede that a law is universally valid for all rational beings at all times, such a law would be categorically binding, and not allow for exceptions. Such a law would also take on the nature of a command (imperative), since if no exceptions are allowed, we will sometimes have to will against our inclinations.

Kant provides several formulations of the categorical imperative, the most common and complete of which is the formulation: 'So act as if [you] were through [your] maxim always a legislating member in the universal kingdom of ends' (43). This formulation brings together the idea of 'universal laws' and 'rational beings', and implies that our actions will only have moral worth if we can universalise our actions (the universal imperative[11]), and if our actions show respect for people as ends in themselves, and not as means towards our ends (the practical imperative[12]).

[10] See 'Deontological Ethics' in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Available online at: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-deontological/ Published November 21, 2007.
[11] 'Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law' (Kant, 1993: 30).
[12] 'Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means to an end' (Kant, 1993: 36).

3.1.3. Virtue ethics

As with Kantian ethics, virtue ethics is also a non-consequentialist position, but unlike Kantian ethics, virtue ethics is a normative position that stresses the moral character of a person, as opposed to impersonal duties or rules. Aristotle is commonly identified as the founding father of virtue ethics[13]. He subscribed to the viewpoint that everything has an ultimate goal or *telos*. Furthermore, he believed that it is good to achieve the goal for which you are destined. Such an achievement would be a good for its own sake (and not a means to a further end). The highest good for humans is *eudaimonia*, understood as a state of well-being and flourishing (see *Ethics*[14], Book I). Aristotle was of the opinion that we could achieve *eudaimonia* if we were to act according to the unique human function, i.e. the function which distinguishes man from all other things, namely rationality.

Aristotle's notion of rationality does not, however, denote a formal rationality, but rather a type of rationality that guides feeling: feeling and rationality are, therefore, closely related. If we act in accordance with reason, we act in accordance with virtue, in that we would know what the appropriate behaviour would imply within a specific context. For Aristotle, acting with virtue implies following the mean between excess and deficiency. This idea is encapsulated in Aristotle's celebrated 'Doctrine of the Mean' (see *Ethics*, Book II), which stands central in Aristotle's ethics, and which is commonly understood as the mean between two vices. For example, the happy mean of bravery lies between foolhardiness and cowardice (for more examples, see De George, 2006: 107; Rossouw et al., 2009: 61). When we act in accordance with the mean, we are acting virtuously.

We are, however, not born virtuous; rather, virtue is something that we develop in relation to others. Society, in a sense, therefore, constitutes the virtuous person by showing us which virtues are held in esteem; and, by presenting us with examples of virtuous people who are admired and who act as moral leaders (De George, 2006: 108). Therefore, as the Greeks used to say, 'to live a good life, one must live in a great city' (Solomon, 2008: 70). The fact that we are not born virtuous further implies that virtues are also something that we develop through our actions. A person who consistently or habitually acts morally is a person of good character (De George, 108). Such a person is said to possess *phronesis,* which can be loosely translated as practical wisdom, and implies that one has the ability to make decisions in circumstances where there are no black or white answers (see *Ethics*, Book VI).

[13] Virtue ethics recently experienced a revival with the publication of Alasdair MacIntyre's (1981) book, entitled *After Virtue: a Study in Moral Theory,* in which he provides both a strong critique of modernity, and a sophisticated revision of Aristotelian virtue ethics.
[14] *Ethics* is an oft-used abbreviation for *The Nicomachean Ethics*.

The above description of the three strands of the normative tale depicts the standard picture of these theories in the business ethics literature. On the one hand, communal theorists, like Aristotle, believe that the good life can only be attained by coming together to create ethically sustainable states and communities. On the other hand, liberal theorists 'trust the capacity of autonomous individuals in making their own rational or optimal choices' (Keleman & Peltonen, 2001: 155). Despite these differences, De George (2008: 78) argues that all three ethical theories 'are in accord on the wrongness of killing others, stealing, lying, and so on.' Regarding the interrelationship between these theories, he writes that:

> Kant's theory, which places its emphasis on human reason, justifies and explains the same basic actions as does Mill's utilitarianism, which places its emphasis on consequences. Both of them consider virtue, but place it in a secondary position, whereas Aristotle's position gives virtues more prominence (78).

As such, De George is of the opinion that one must be careful of overemphasising the differences between these theories, lest one forgets that these theories all constitute an attempt to define our moral inclinations and intuitions.

Despite the fact that these normative theories can offer valuable guidance when one tries to answer the question, 'what ought I to do, morally-speaking?', these theories are, nevertheless, also plagued by various substantive and procedural difficulties. In the section that follows, the specific advantages and disadvantages of each of the three theories will be investigated.

3.2. Critical evaluation of the normative ethical theories

3.2.1. Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism can be praised for trying to give practical guidelines based on empirical arguments as opposed to transcendental appeals, such as is the case with Kantian ethics. Furthermore, the utilitarian standard was developed in order to evaluate and criticise the social and political institutions during both Bentham's and Mill's lifetimes, and did lead to the alleviation of suffering and social improvements. However, a highly disputable utilitarian claim is that the entire moral world can be expressed in units of pleasure/ happiness/utility and pain/unhappiness/disutility. Bentham's (2001: 87) original premise – that we are governed by 'two sovereign masters, *pain* and

pleasure' – is hardly an adequate description of morality. However, even if we accept this premise, further problems emerge with the application of this principle.

Firstly, the fact that the definition of the good is subjectively defined by a decision-maker, whose preferences can apparently be easily articulated and freely chosen between, is dubious (Jones et al., 2005: 33). Indeed, Freudian theory has long dispelled the idea that something like a self-transparent consciousness exists (34). Secondly, not only is it assumed that one's own preferences are transparent, but that the preferences of others can also be measured, and that accurate judgements are possible in complex social situations. Given this instrumental moral orientation, utilitarians run the risk of both objectifying other humans, and of ignoring the substantive value considerations that define every act of calculation and compromise (Painter-Morland, 2008: 553; 4). Thirdly, it is likely that the 'relation between individual and collective goods is not as straightforward as utilitarians might have us believe' (Jones et al., 2005: 37). Indeed, commonsense dictates that there are many instances in which sacrificing the individual for the collective good is not morally acceptable (see footnote 21).

Compounding this information problem of individual and collective preferences, as well as the relation between them, is the fact that actions have future consequences that also need to be taken into consideration. Decisions are made in complex environments, and affect many stakeholders over long periods. Practically-speaking, business practitioners, for example, rely on past knowledge in order to predict future outcomes. However, as noted by Rolland Munro (1998: 209) 'the idea that the future will resemble the past is always fraught with induction'. As a consequence, business practitioners are unable to predict the future consequences of their actions, and end up managing only for today. Or, in the words of Munro (209): 'Tomorrow is not something today's incumbent feels responsible for.' Given our inadequate and partial assumptions regarding the effects of these judgements, we simply cannot make accurate moral judgements (Jones et al., 2005: 38). This is further evidenced by the fact that business practitioners often find it difficult to see how their actions could have caused human misery.

3.2.2. Kantian ethics

The categorical imperative is a formal rule, and, therefore, holds the advantage over utilitarianism that it does not prescribe the substantive content of ethical behaviour. The freedom of the individual ethical agent to make her own moral decision is, therefore, valued. Furthermore, the theory attempts

to remove prejudice by placing emphasis on respect for all rational beings. The value and the dignity of the individual, therefore, receive top priority.

However, as we will see in section 4.2., several problems can be identified with regard to the application of a formal rule or principle-based ethics, and these problems should not be forgotten in the context of Kantian ethics. The most serious of these problems is the fact that no categorically-binding theory has ever been identified. An implication of this is that a universal ethics that does not allow for any exceptions (such as Kantian ethics), cannot deal with the problem of conflicting categorical duties. In other words, Kant 'cannot assist us in deciding between two equally 'rational' moral directives' (Painter-Morland, 2008: 58).

In order to illustrate this point, Mollie Painter-Morland (58) offers the example of a business practitioner who has made several promises to different stakeholders in good faith. If a situation occurs where the practitioner is no longer able to fulfil all these promises, she will inevitably be forced to choose where to direct her resources and energies. According to Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes (2007: 112), ethics is at stake in situations (such as presented in the above example) where 'no third meta-rule can be applied to resolve the dilemma'. This problem is further compounded by the complex and competitive nature of the business environment. In such a context, it is unlikely 'that the mature moral agent has the ability to rationally retreat from his/her immersion in particular role-responsibilities and employ the universalisation test, in order to judge the categorical validity of various possible courses of action' (Painter-Morland, 2008: 59).

Even if it were possible for the moral agent to objectively apply the universalisation test, and even if no competing moral obligations exist, the outcome of applying the test may also not necessarily be desirable. To apply principles categorically, often leads to morally dubious actions as seen in Munro's (1998: 218) reference to Rae Langton's (1992) paper on letters between Kant and Maria von Herbert:

> Briefly, von Herbert has, belatedly, followed Kant's advice in his books over telling the truth to the terrible detriment of her life, and she is now writing to him to request that he rethink his proscription over suicide. In his unthinking refusal and belittling comments, it is difficult to see Kant as other than insular, shabby and chauvinist in this affair.

Zygmunt Bauman (1993: 39; 40) builds on this type of criticism by arguing that Kant's universal man must disavow moral reasoning as a temporal and territory-bound practice in favour of abstract

universal principles. As a result, autonomous moral responsibility is relegated to living out one's duty according to 'universal, extemporal and extraterritorial principles' (39). As such, the most serious problems haunting the Kantian project 'primarily have to do with Kant's postulation of a rational independent moral agent, capable of distancing him/herself from personal prejudice and contextual biases for the sake of objective moral deliberations' (Painter-Morland, 2008: 63).

Bauman (1993: 38) further argues that a universal ethics can only be justified if images of good and evil do not differ from one place to another. In a heterogeneous world, one can only defend the universality of one's moral rules if other rules are not only shown to be 'just different, but mistaken or evil: that their acceptance is an outcome of ignorance and immaturity, if not of ill will' (38). This criticism is more applicable to utilitarianism than to Kantian ethics, as the categorical imperative is a formal, and therefore, substantively empty principle. However, it does raise problems for applying the categorical imperative. The universalisation test, as a test for moral permissibility, seems to vary in outcome, depending on the beliefs and values of the moral agent. Although one can try to circumvent this problem by placing oneself in other people's shoes, the fact remains that there is no one objective standard against which one can measure the rightness of one's actions.

The problem with Kantian ethics is succinctly described by Munro (1998: 200) as an individuation problem in that it 'encourages us to split knowledge between the primary task of conducting a surveillance of the 'core' self [we 'account for the self, to the self' (Roberts in Munro, 1998: 197)] and the secondary matter of knowing others in terms of their 'needs'.' According to Munro's (1998: 204) interpretation of Bauman (1991), it is impossible to reduce the other to knowledge of her 'needs' without the condition of ethical distance. In such circumstances, 'rationality' is opposed to 'ethicality', as people are posited and understood as means, rather than ends in themselves. Ironically then, ethical distance safeguards the Kantian project, because without this distance, '[t]he ethical self would flounder under the sheer weight of knowledge which it would be necessary to gather, and assess, prior to making each decision' (Munro, 1998: 205).

Therefore, there can be no overarching rules, as people have different conceptions of what counts as the good, and also apply the rules differently. Without this acknowledgement, we see how the 'hideous purity' (Law in Parker 1998b: 290) of modernity becomes a justification for various forms of cruelty[15].

[15] In *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), Bauman makes the argument that the Holocaust 'should not be seen as an aberration of modern civilization, but rather as *a* product of it' (ten Bos, 1997: 997).

3.2.3. Virtue ethics

The recently revival and widespread uptake of virtue ethics in the applied field is evidence of the many practical benefits associated with virtue ethics. Given the ever-increasing complexity of today's world, virtue ethics stands to benefit moral decision-making in that it is a practical, 'lived' ethics. Ethical decision-making emerges and develops through life experience, and is not based on abstract rules. In this regard, virtue ethics allows for sound ethical decision-making in ambiguous situations. Furthermore, virtue ethics fosters sensitivity towards social and political conditions. This is because the good life is an interdependent life. As such, our actions cannot be construed as ethically neutral since they affect other people. Ethical action is considered and contextually-based action, rather that action that coincides with *a priori* rules. Another benefit of virtue ethics is that it considers the whole spectrum of human actions: virtues enable us to successfully fulfil our social roles. Ethics cannot be divorced from these social roles, and from this perspective, statements such as 'business ethics is an oxymoron' simply prove to be moronic! A last advantage of virtue ethics worth mentioning is the fact that virtue ethics demands that we argue for the ethics that we assume. Since no feelings are in themselves good or bad, we must be led by reason when assuming an ethical stance. Furthermore, the type and degree of feeling that we exhibit needs to be justified within a particular context – business or otherwise.

These advantages of virtue ethics go a long way towards addressing the problems associated with universal positions that rely on abstract, contextless rules or fixed conceptions of the good. However, when uncritically applied, virtue ethics runs the risk of sliding into a 'born-again' communitarian position (Bauman, 1993: 44) which fares no better than the universal position. Mautner (2005: 112) defines communitarianism as:

> a social and political theory which rejects the individualism considered to be inherent in liberal political theory, and which puts an emphasis on values and goals of a collective nature… The ethical theory of writers who advocate communitarianism is in many cases virtue-orientated, in opposition to ethics of individual autonomy [such as Kantian ethics], and it is argued that the virtues needed for human flourishing can only be exercised in a society which has a distinctive communal way of life.

Communitarianism is heavily indebted to Aristotelian virtue ethics. Despite the emphasis that virtue ethics places on moral character, we see that the character of the individual moral agent develops through education and the good example of others. In other words, the development of moral

character is contingent upon societal conceptions of the good. It is, therefore appropriate to read some of Bauman's critique against this position, as a critique of an overly-optimistic uptake of virtue ethics in fields such as business ethics.

What is clear from the above description is that normative priorities are communally defined within the communitarian perspective. Bauman, however, warns that the idea of the moral agent rooted in a community, is by no means a natural given. Indeed, Bauman (1993: 46) argues that the situated self is controversially constructed by 'self-appointed spokesmen… [who] deny or at least curtail the individual moral discretion.' Membership to a community is, therefore, defined in terms that do not really allow for the possibility of individual dissent (Painter-Morland, 2008: 77). Communitarianism also shows little sensitivity for the 'subtle but significant differences in perspective that often exist among those who participate in a social system of relations' (80-81). This obviously undermines the ability of the individual moral agent to argue for a specific ethical position, which is incongruent with the ethical positions generally held by a particular society.

According to Bauman (1993: 47), only rules that can withstand 'this 'depersonalization' are seen as meeting the conditions set for *ethical* norms.' Bauman (48-50) (following Levinas), argues that moral relations can only be entered into by the individual (not the collective), and moral prescriptions can only apply to individual moral agents. In other words, moral communities are only possible due to the moral competence of their individual members. We are, therefore, firstly moral and then social (Keleman & Peltonen, 2001: 159). For Bauman (1993: 50), the difference between ethical prescriptives directed at the individual as opposed to at the abstract collective lies in the word *responsibility*: 'When addressed to me, responsibility is moral'. Bauman further argues that it is exactly due to the uniqueness (rather than generalisability) of responsibility that I can be placed in a moral relationship (51). He elaborates on this point, stating that:

> converting the object of responsibility to my standard, taking him or her into my possession, putting under my command, making identical with myself in this or any other respect, and thus stripping him or her of *their* responsibility, which constitutes *their* alterity, their *uniqueness* – is most certainly not the outcome my responsibility may pursue or contemplate without denying itself, without ceasing, to be a moral stance. Our 'moral party' is not one of fusion, of identity, of joint submission to a 'third term'... (53).

From the above citation, we see that Bauman's argument is directed against both universal and communal standards and understandings of responsibility, since both these positions necessarily

appeal to generalised duties over individual responsibilities. As such, these positions strive to '*substitute heteronomous ethical duty for autonomous moral responsibility*'[16], that is, the subjection of a community of individuals to the rule of an external law (46). In this sense, both universal man and communitarian man suffer from the same affliction: namely, 'the exappropriation of the individual's right to moral judgment' (47). Bauman contends that morality can never have the character of a rule – instead, the moral is that 'which *resists* codification, formalization, socialization, universalization' (47).

3.2.4. Summary

Therefore, in summary, one can say that utilitarianism holds the benefit of being empirically-grounded, but because it is based on the assumption that the ultimate grounds of morality (as an expression of pleasure, utility or happiness) can be determined, it leaves no room for contesting interpretations of what morality may entail. Furthermore, utilitarians express our moral responsibilities in terms of numbers. According to Bauman (1993: 47), '[h]umanity is not captured in common denominators – it sinks and vanishes there'. As such, not only is respect for the dignity of the individual undermined in a utilitarian analysis, but true moral responsibility is also impossible. This is due to the fact that moral responsibility can only be assumed by individuals. When viewed as pertaining to a collective, responsibility becomes a rule or duty (54). Kantians – although not guilty of reducing the unique individual to the collective – are, nonetheless, guilty of turning responsibility into duty, dictated by a formal, universal rule; which, when applied, has the effect of turning people into subjectively defined sets of needs. Although virtue ethicists resist the type of formalisations characteristic of rule or principle-based ethical theories, a naïve and depoliticized notion of virtue ethics can easily lead to the subversion of the individual to the community.

Painter-Morland (2008: 81) succinctly sums up the two main problems with the standard normative tale as follows: Firstly, procedure is emphasised at the expense of substance i.e. 'little attention is paid to the meaning of the good that these procedures embody' (this criticism holds for Kantian ethics and utilitarianism). Secondly, problems arise regarding the relationship between the individuals and society, as well as the way in which moral beliefs are thought to be constituted in

[16] It is important to note that Bauman's understanding of morality is similar to the understanding of ethics employed in this study, and vice-versa. In the context of this study, morality is equated with moral codes, formal principles, and institutionalised normative expressions, whereas ethics is concerned with the individual's normative propriety and pronouncements. The opposite applies to Bauman's (1993: 31-32) categorisation of ethics and morality. In this regard, consider the following citation: 'Human reality is messy and ambiguous – and so moral decisions, unlike abstract ethical principles, are ambivalent' (32).

institutions such as organisations. This second problem has two important consequences with regard to the normative ethical theories: these theories tend to either universalise (and, thereby) generalise ethical norms (as seen from the above critique), or the theories individualise and particularise to the point of fragmentation[17]. As such, many of the ethical theories cannot simultaneously accommodate the individual moral agent and the institutions or communities to which she belongs, and in which she participates. In other words, '[t]he locus of control in morality is almost invariably exclusively associated with either the one or the other' (85).

4. The standard normative tale: depicting and applying the normative ethical theories

Having briefly provided both an overview of the standard normative tale, and a critical discussion of the three normative ethical theories that comprise this tale, it is now necessary to turn our focus to how this tale is applied in business ethics. In section 4.1., a critical investigation of how the standard normative tale is taught in business ethics is presented. The emphasis is on the manner in which the tale is commonly conveyed to business students, and the implications that this presentation holds for students' perceptions of ethical decision-making. In section 4.2., the actual application of the standard normative tale to ethical issues that arise in a business context is investigated, and the success of the normative ethical theories for helping practitioners to deal with ethical problems is gauged.

4.1. Problems with the standard depictions of the normative ethical theories

The first problem with the standard normative tale concerns the scope of the tale. Jones et al. (2005: 3) note that:

> Despite the fact that ethics has been hotly debated in philosophy throughout the twentieth century and has been one of the major sources of philosophical reflection up to the close of the millennium, the discipline of business ethics has insulated itself from these developments, either ignoring them altogether or misrepresenting them so that it looks as if twentieth century philosophy has nothing interesting to say about ethics.

Thus, the objection here is that the standard normative tale only presents half the story when it comes to presenting the ideas available in moral philosophy, without any motivated reason for

[17] This latter point constitutes the problem of subjectivism or relativism, briefly addressed in section 4.2.1., as well as in chapter two, section 6.1.

doing so. Moreover, the standard normative tale is slanted towards the Anglo-American or analytic, as opposed to the European or continental philosophical tradition. This may go some way towards explaining why twentieth century ethics has largely been ignored in this tale: the most influential ethical positions of the twentieth century were developed by continental philosophers, such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Emmanuel Levinas. However, the above citation (by Jones et al.) strongly implies that disciplinary developments do not fully account for this omission.

Perhaps a more prominent reason for this omission concerns the *type* of normative theories that have become popular in the business ethics field. In contrast to much of twentieth century philosophy, Kantian and utilitarian positions present us with what is popularly referred to as rule or principle-based ethics[18]. In other words, both the categorical imperative and the greatest happiness principle represent attempts to codify ethical behaviour. A great advantage of such normative positions is that they are compatible with a compliance-based model of ethics: codes of conduct or disciplinary structures and procedures, for example, can easily ground their moral authority in a principle or rule-based ethics. Rules and principles also aid in reducing the undecidability that often characterises moral decision-making, and are, therefore, easy to apply. However, as will be seen in section 4.2., such simplifications of the ethical task do not necessarily hold good consequences for practice. Before looking at the application problems, it is necessary to first provide some critical comments regarding the depiction of these theories in standard business ethics textbooks.

4.1.1. Standard depictions of utilitarianism

Out of the three normative ethical theories, utilitarianism is the most accurately expressed in the business ethics literature. Furthermore, its uptake in the business world has arguably been the greatest of all three normative streams, and the current mode of privileging mathematised and codified knowledge (or the calculating view of anything happening in the organisation) can be seen

[18] All normative positions are in fact guided by principles and rules. Even the most decentralised positions can be rewritten in the language of rules. The reason for this is that since there are no 'natural realities' (Derrida 1988a: 134) – a point that will be expounded upon later in this dissertation – a rule must be invoked in order to select, sanction or evaluate a certain position (normative or otherwise). However, in the context of this study, rule or principle-based positions refer to ethical theories that do not account for their own provisionality (i.e. the fact that they are models or tools for guiding ethical behaviour, rather than blueprints – that if followed – guarantee ethical behaviour); or, that disregard the context in which their rules are invoked (thereby uplifting morality to a transcendental level). In contrast to this, non-rule-based positions refer to positions that account for their own limitations, and that espouse an ethics that is sensitive to these limitations. Non-rule-based positions are, therefore, constantly under revision, in order to mitigate the impact of these limitations.

as being derived from this normative position[19] (Jones et al., 2005: 36). Indeed, Parker (1998b: 288; 287) argues that utilitarian formulations are the most symptomatic outcomes of the Weberian view of the bureaucratic organisation, which involves modern forms of 'ordering' i.e. placing people and things in systematic, calculable, and repeatable relationships. In this sense, the modern bureaucracy[20], like Bentham's description of the Panopticon, is 'a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example' (Bentham, 1791: i-ii).

Bureaucratic administrators have, no doubt, benefited significantly from the easy application of utilitarian principles to moral problems. In fact, free market capitalism itself functions on the premise that such a system leads to the greatest good for the greatest number of people (see Adam Smith's (1985: 16) argument for the invisible hand of the market). However, although this calculating view has long been privileged, this simplistic rendition of human nature is itself marred by 'confusion, illusion, and delusion' (Warburton, 2000: 7). As stated in section 3.2., it is a dangerous simplicity to presume that we can reduce the other to a knowledge about their needs, since such a presupposition causes ethical distance (or the denigration of the moral impulse), effacement of the other's face, and the reduction of individuals to bundles of traits (Bauman, 1989; 1991; 1993). This, in turn, allows us to calculate benefits for stakeholders, without having to adjudicate between them as *individuals*, or as 'a class of beings who may potentially *confront* the actor as "faces"' (Bauman, 1993: 127; my italics). On the utilitarian analysis, '[t]he scales of justice swing this way and that, without regard to their content because justice, like the bureaucrat, is intentionally blind' (Parker, 1998b: 288). The privileged position of utilitarianism, therefore, 'cannot be maintained by simplicity alone' (Jones et al., 2005: 36) as the consequences of such a calculating view can be devastating[21].

[19] Consider the example of company lay-offs: statements such as 'I'm sorry, but we've got to let you go as there is not enough revenue to support your job' allow managers to transfer their ethical responsibilities to the numbers (Munro, 1998: 205).

[20] René ten Bos (1997: 999) argues that not all contemporary organisations are bureaucracies of the type that Weber or Bauman had in mind. However, despite this, we see that most organisations (even those operating 'entirely under an anti-bureaucratic cloak') prize 'moral technology' above 'moral quality'. Parker (1998b: 288) asserts that a primary reason for why the 'bureaucratization of the ethical' is difficult to avoid is because 'speaking of ethics within business effectively rules out many of the ways of formulating decision-making and responsibility that are not amendable to managerial rationalizations'.

[21] One of the most famous examples against utilitarianism involves an episode at New York's Willowbrook State Hospital, which at the time (1956), was New York's largest institution for retarded children. Two doctors – who were researching the progression of hepatitis – approached the authorities at Willowbrook with the request to study the retarded children, as a large percentage of them had hepatitis. The controversial part of the research involved infecting healthy children with the disease, as it was argued that they would most likely contract the disease in any case. As a result of their studies, the doctors successfully developed a vaccine against hepatitis, but the question remains whether it is ethically justified to sacrifice the health of a few children, in order to promote the health of many (see Jonsen, 2003: 153-154).
A similar case in the context of biomedical ethics is the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment (Jones, 1981). This case involved a clinical study in which impoverished African-American men were left untreated for syphilis and were prevented from seeking treatment elsewhere. Once again, the purpose of the study was for

In a sense, the critique offered against utilitarianism feeds into the much larger critique against treating business ethics as a technology. This critique is also relevant to depictions of Kantian ethics and virtue ethics. Although both of these philosophies present us with carefully motivated, and subtly-complex ethical positions, 'the instrumentalisation' of their positions is evident in the manner in which these theories are often presented in business ethics textbooks. Frequently, Kant's and Aristotle's main insights are distilled into a couple of premises that are presented as concise summaries of their thoughts. Alternatively, their insights are reduced to procedural forms of reasoning (Verstraeten, 2000: 3). The danger with such simplifications is that the content of ethical theories gets distorted and depicted as a set of easy-to-follow rules, principles, or virtues; which, on a theoretical level, are free from tension and difficulty. Consequently, business ethics students view the ethical theories as unambiguous moral codes or prescriptions that can be directly applied to business problems. To illustrate this point, a brief evaluation of the standard application of virtue ethics and Kantian ethics is presented.

4.1.2. Standard depictions of Kantian ethics

Jones et al. (2005: 55) argue that 'business ethicists have tended to make Kant far more palatable and less challenging than he is if we read him carefully.' The depiction of Kantian ethics in standard business ethics textbooks focuses on the categorical imperative, understood as the ethical prescription against which we can test our actions in order to deduce whether they are morally permissible or not. Bowie (2008: 57) – who is largely credited with bringing Kantian ethics to the business world – argues that we freely choose to act in accordance with the categorical imperative, as we recognise this law to be the rational and moral foundation of our actions. The ethical person is a person who acts from the right intention, and, therefore, from a sense of duty.

However, Jones et al. (2005: 46) question Bowie's optimistic uptake of Kantian ethics, arguing that Kant himself was a lot less sure about the possibilities of rational autonomous behaviour. The idea that the categorical imperative is indeed an imperative shows that it can misfire: either you obey the imperative or you don't. Kant argues that if our actions were completely rational, morality would

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researchers to study the disease. The clinical study spanned a 40-year time period, and was conducted between 1932 and 1972.

In the context of business ethics, the Ford Pinto case (see Shaw, 2008: 78-82) presents the most famous example against a consequentialist analysis. In this case, the Ford Company decided not to remove the Ford Pinto from the market, even though it was established that the Pinto presents a serious fire hazard when struck from the rear. Their decision was based on an analysis of the costs that would be incurred from taking the necessary safety precautions compared to the societal costs arising from the loss of life. Based on this analysis, Ford continued with the production of the Pinto. The Ford Pinto case presents an example of egoism, but goes some way towards illustrating the effects of a calculating, depersonalised utilitarian methodology.

be reduced to a technocratic application of universal imperatives. In his own words: 'conduct would thus be changed into mere mechanism in which, as in a puppet-show, everything would gesticulate well, but there would be no life in the figures' (Kant, 2008: 127)[22]. For true morality to exist – for humans to act out of duty, and not merely in accordance with duty – a certain struggle must take place. This struggle is rooted in human imperfection and lack of knowledge, which paradoxically, allows for choice and, therefore, for moral freedom.

Jones et al. (2005:53-54) argue that the 'very effort to create moral transparency through a fetishistic form of bureaucratic rule following would be condemned by Kant as profoundly immoral.' Indeed, Bowie's uptake of Kantian ethics, as a means of controlling collective behaviour through stressing ethical duties and rules, is very much at odds with Kant's own orientation (52). When Kant's categorical imperative is interpreted as a rationale for institutionalising immutable universal laws in bureaucracies (which, as Painter-Morland (2008: 62) argues, it often is), 'self-respect, integrity, empathy, autonomy, conscience, or individual responsibility' changes into 'self-sacrifice, obedience… docility, duty and discipline' (Bauman, 1989: 21; 160). This is because, in such circumstances, the horison of one's actions is not determined by how one thinks about these actions, but by whether these actions accord with 'the rules laid down by those who occupy a higher rank in the bureaucratic hierarchy' (ten Bos, 1997: 999).

Kant always focuses on the individual ethical being and her freedom and struggles. When morality is denigrated to mere rule-following or proceduralism, the ethical struggle, which characterises human finitude, and which allows for human dignity and moral autonomy, is denied. As such, the question of 'doing good' is replaced with pure discipline (1009).

4.1.3. Standard depictions of virtue ethics

As with the standard uptake of Kantian ethics in the business ethics literature, one can also identify problems with the manner in which Aristotle's virtue ethics is commonly conveyed to business ethics students. The first problem with this standard depiction relates to Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, whereas the second has to do with the conceptualisation and application of Aristotle's conception of the community.

[22] Although, at first glance, this clarification seems to overcome Bauman's critique that Kant's universal man is doomed to live out a generalised duty rather than to practice true moral autonomy, the point remains that moral responsibility is dictated by abstract universal rules. As such, the scope of one's responsibilities is limited to accepting one's formal duties. This is because responsibility does not extend beyond the categorical imperative.

In *The Moral Philosophers: an Introduction to Ethics*, Richard Norman (1998: 35) argues that the doctrine of the mean is often superficially understood. Generally, the doctrine of the mean is construed as a mean in relation to a thing or a concept. In this case the doctrine of the mean would constitute the midpoint between two extremes. The example used earlier was that of bravery, which marks the midpoint between foolhardiness and cowardice. The problem with this uptake is that the doctrine of the mean would always promote a stance of sober caution. Norman claims that Aristotle is emphatic that this popular reading is not the stance that he is advocating (36). For Aristotle, the mean should be construed in relation to us. In this sense the mean should be understood as follows:

> It is possible, for example, to feel fear, confidence, desire, anger, pity, and pleasure and pain generally, too much or too little; and both of these are wrong. But to have these feelings at the right times on the right grounds towards the right people for the right motives and in the right way is to feel them to an intermediate, that is to the best, degree; and this is the mark of virtue (*Ethics*, 1106b, 18-23).

To observe the mean, therefore, does not necessarily imply choosing the midpoint between two extremes. It all depends on the circumstances. Although this conception of the mean does not amount to the attractive and substantial doctrine provided by the popular interpretation, it does help in illuminating the relation between reason and feeling. The doctrine of the mean implies that actions cannot be intrinsically right or wrong, but should coincide with feelings that accord with the mean. As such, feeling is not subordinated to reason. Reason, instead, guides feeling to correspond with the mean. This allows for a more fruitful interpretation of action: on this account, 'an action which accords with the mean will be an action which is an expression of feelings which accord with the mean' (Norman, 1998: 37). Despite presenting us with a more fruitful interpretation, the above understanding of the doctrine of the mean also presents us with a more difficult interpretation. No longer is it sufficient to employ an easy-to-follow formula in order to ascertain what type of action accords with the mean. Rather, determining the correct action in a particular circumstance demands moral sensitivity and ethical work.

In order to illuminate the second problem – namely the conceptualisation and application of Aristotle's idea of the community – we turn to the work of Robert Solomon. Solomon (2008) is a leading business ethics scholar, focusing on the application of virtue ethics in the business arena. Following Aristotle and the Greeks, he argues that '[o]ur individuality is socially constituted and socially situated' and, as cited before, 'to live a good life one must live in a great city' (70). In this

sense, virtuosity can be defined as 'a community orientated form of practical action.' (Jones et al., 2005: 65). Solomon (2008: 70) applies this argument to business, stating that:

> The Aristotelian approach and, I would argue, the leading question for business… begins with the idea that business is first of all a community. We are all individuals, to be sure, but we find our identity and meaning only within communities, and for most of us that means – at work in a company or an institution.

In the above citation, we see how Aristotle's conceptualisation of ancient Athens' political community is directly extended to current business communities, without any real consideration of how these communities may differ. Jones et al. (2005: 66) argue that 'there is no particular reason why we should not try to live well and virtuously at work'; however, one must take note of the fact that work practices constitute only 'a pale shadow of the really complex and difficult virtue that is needed amongst our friends and community.' Such a virtue cannot simply be switched on and off at the beginning and the end of the work day, but characterises a way of being together in a social community. Little consideration is also given in the applied literature to the political tensions, confusions, and contradictions that characterise Aristotle's conception of the political community (60; 66). This liberal application of virtue ethics allows for a sentimental understanding of business 'as a potentially warm place inhabited by fully human beings' (58; see Solomon, 1992; 1999).

A related problem that Jones et al. (2005:67) identify in the direct application of virtue ethics to a business setting, is the disregard that such an application shows for the specificity of what virtues might entail in different contexts, during different historical periods. Indeed, the question of 'How should I live a good life?' cannot be answered by referring to a universal code of virtues. Athenians or Spartans might have had very different answers to this question than do contemporary business managers (66). Similarly, different business settings may require different virtues, and merely coming up with a neat list of forty five virtues applicable to business today – as does Solomon (1999) in his book *A Better Way to Think about Business* – seems to go against the very grain of an ethics which focuses upon the social context in which morality and virtues develop.

4.1.4. Evaluation

The above criticism of the general depiction of the standard normative tale in the business ethics literature is by no means exhaustive. Rather, the point is merely to illustrate what is at stake when we reduce canonical texts to simple prescriptions such as: 'Always choose the midpoint between

two extremes'; 'Strive towards living a virtuous life within a supportive business community, typified by associations of equal citizens'; or, 'Always act in such a way that your behaviour *coincides* with the categorical imperative'. Such prescriptions, when translated into moral codes, tend to encourage employees to suspend or defer their personal moral beliefs, and to ignore the tensions, contradictions, paradoxes, limitations, fallibility, and opacity that characterise ethical actions. It is exactly due to these reasons that utilitarianism is so popular. However, applying utilitarianism without exercising discernment, or merely accepting the standard Kantian or Aristotelian maxims, is a negation of the very heart of ethics.

Following this line of argument, Jones et al. (2005: 2) argue that business ethics – in its uncritical and/or narrow appropriation of these normative positions – has failed to deliver on what it has promised, namely talk of ethics and justice. This failure presents us with not only a technical failure, but also a moral failure, because as Willmott (1998: 84) suggests:

> Textbooks in which work organizations are presented as technical and value-neutral invite students to read their contents as 'descriptive' rather than 'normative' accounts of their subject matter and, in doing so, to suspend any moral misgivings as well as intellectual belief.

Willmott further argues that codes of conduct and texts of this nature 'legitimize a particular kind of closure in respect of the reality of management and organizations: a closure, that is, which conflates 'descriptive' with 'normative' ethics' (84). Perversely then, the increased interest in business ethics and instruments designed to nurture ethics in organisations (such as codes of conduct), may limit and undermine the capacity and inclination 'to appreciate and *wrestle* with ethical issues and dilemmas' (97).

This problem is amplified when these simple prescriptions (or moral maxims) are incorporated into a form of procedural reasoning, whereby moral dilemmas are apparently resolved by following formulae such as: 'When there is a clash between two or more virtues, choose the most important virtue'; 'When there is a clash between two or more obligations, choose the most important obligation' (see Barry, 1986); or, to introduce an example of a slightly more sophisticated model, 'identify the problem; generate alternative solutions; evaluate the alternatives, using cost-benefit approaches; select the solution; implement the chosen solution' (Kitson & Campbell, 1996: 23). Such procedures reduce ethics to a purely instrumental reasoning that pays no heed to the normative judgements that are needed to discern and order virtues and obligations in terms of importance. As

such, Johan Verstraeten (2000: 4) argues that business ethics textbooks often end where moral formation or judgement begins.

Paradoxically, however, the complex nature of ethical action is often appealed to in organisational practices as a justification for procedural or instrumental reasoning, or for ethical wrongdoing. In such circumstances, '[m]orality is sacrificed on the altar of complexity' (ten Bos, 1997: 1001). The uncertainty that results from complexity cannot simply be discounted, or reduced to proceduralism. The reasons for this are threefold: firstly, as we have seen, moral agency is denied when a person's actions are determined by external criteria or predetermined rules. Secondly, in practice, people are confronted with a plurality of prescriptions, procedures, and morals. Merely following one model may not be a reason for dismissing an alternative model. And, thirdly, models cannot fully account for contingencies: some interpretation is always needed (Clegg et al. 2007: 111). As such, the 'objectivity' of procedural fairness can never be legitimated on the grounds of truth, or the realism of any metaphysical propositions (see Porter, 1992).

When business ethicists teaching or practices are premised on blind rule-following, they act 'as a technology… for the reduction of undecidability', and, through this, become:

> much the same as described by the German philosopher Theodor Adorno, as a form of mathematised and codified knowledge in which thought is removed and 'which robots can learn and copy' (1973:30) – textbook knowledge for puppets, not knowledge that you gain by thinking for yourself (Jones et al., 2005:8).

4.2. Problems with the application of the standard normative ethical theories

Whether the normative theories are inherently characterised by an instrumental thinking or whether the theories are reduced to a few instrumental prescriptions, the effect is the same: it is assumed that the ethical theory unproblematically provides all the answers and that the challenge lies in motivating individuals to act and adhere to these ethical prescriptions. The standard approach to applying ethical theory, therefore, follows a top-down trajectory. At one extreme the moral agent bears little individual accountability for her actions, besides complying with, and applying predetermined rules. A possible consequence is that when prescriptive principles are translated into universal moral codes designed to stimulate ethical thought, they may – in practice – achieve the opposite effect and instead serve to diminish moral awareness and sensitivity (as argued above). In such instances, parochiality is presented as universalism (Willmott, 1998: 93).

At the other extreme, however, we have the common criticism that business practitioners find the qualitative, philosophical approach foreign, and often have a negative attitude towards this approach. Sorell (1998: 17) argues 'that relations between academic ethicists and practitioners is much more uneasy in the case of business than in such areas as medicine, legal advocacy, police work or public administration' (see Stark, 1993). He contends that whereas there is wide agreement concerning the purpose of doctors, lawyers, police, or political office-holding; mainstream business goals look dubious to the ethicist, whereas lofty academic ideals come across as self-righteous or utopian to the practitioner. In short, ethicists are distanced from practitioners (a phenomenon Sorell dubs the *alienation problem*[23]).

A consequence of the alienation problem is that we are often left with 'a wholly ineffectual business ethics' (Sorrel, 1998: 17). Sorrel (17) argues that such a position need not be self-contradictory as there is still a case to be made for providing normative justifications for certain business practices; however, he claims that 'the ethical point of doing so when no business people are listening is perhaps a little obscure.' The consequences resulting from the alienation problem are compounded when rule or principle-based ethical approaches are further simplified or instrumentalised through their depictions and applications. Below follows a more in depth description of why this might be the case.

4.2.1. There are no categorically-binding rules or principles

Joseph DesJardins (2004: 97) identifies the fact that we have not found any rules that are categorically-binding on all people, in all contexts, at all times, as one of the most serious problems to haunt rule or principle-based normative theories. Even an empty, formal rule such as the categorical imperative seldom provides unambiguous answers to practical problems. With careful formulations, one can universalise many things. This problem is further compounded when one introduces competing ethical theories, such as utilitarianism – which, in practice, often yields radically different ethical 'answers' to the Kantian approach, for example.

The above argument can be restated in the following way: moral theories do not a) provide a 'complete answer to the question, "What ought I to do?"' and, b) do not 'solve all of one's practical moral dilemmas' (Hoffman, 1984: 263-264). In his article, 'The course in business ethics: Why

[23] Sorell is by no means the first to acknowledge the alienation problem. Many authors (Francis & Armstrong, 2003; Jones, 1995; Joyner & Paine, 2002; Raiborn & Payne, 1996) have all debated whether ethics and business goals (such as competitive advantage and profitability) can be aligned. Clegg et al. (2007: 109) trace the origins of this problem back to Adam Smith's view on the invisible hand of the market, and Karl Marx's rebuttal of this view.

don't philosophers give business students what they need?', George Pamental (1991: 388; 389) argues that students of philosophy have extensive training in logical analysis and ethical argumentation, which allows them to discriminate between different normative positions and identify plausible solutions. However, business students and practitioners have no training in philosophical analysis and struggle to mediate between these different positions. As a result, they adopt either a relativist approach – where theories are viewed as mutually interchangeable; or, a subjectivist approach – where priority is accorded to one theory, which automatically becomes the default position in all situations. Ethics is also often regarded as a 'soft' science, which lacks theoretical foundation (Donaldson, 2003: 363). Such a view stems from the perception that ethics is 'an incursion from a moral realm outside ordinary practice and orderly theory (Feldman, 2004), an incursion from a transcendent and barely grasped tradition' (Clegg et al., 2007: 107).

4.2.2. The character of the moral agent is not taken into consideration

This perception of ethics as transcendent and other-worldly, ties in with the second major problem associated with applying many ethical theories, namely that abstract rules also do not take the character of the moral agent into consideration. The focus of such abstract rules is more on the type of actions an ethical agent should undertake, rather than on the type of person the ethical agent should be. A further related problem is that principle and rule-based ethical theories are external to the moral agent. Before being applied, the external rules should first be accepted, internalised, and adopted by the moral agent. The motivation to act on a principle is also inversely proportional to the abstract character of the principle i.e. the degree to which it is rationally binding on all people at all times (DesJardins, 2004: 97). This means that, whereas most people might accept the categorical imperative (for example) as a legitimate ethical prescription, few people will be motivated to make ethical decisions on the basis of this prescription. Past experiences and contextual considerations are likely to play a much larger role in informing individuals' decisions.

Once again, Pamental (1991: 390) concurs with these points, arguing that philosophical questions often hold 'little or no interest to the individuals facing the day-to-day difficulties of decision-making in an organization vying in a competitive market'. Pamental (390) goes on to illustrate this problem with the following example:

> During fourteen years in business I never participated in a serious discussion of the merits of capitalism versus those of Marxism. In all my discussions with people in business, I have never encountered one who was particularly concerned with the legitimacy of the

corporation, nor have I ever met a business person who felt compelled to know whether the corporation can or cannot have a conscience.

Although the above examples do not directly concern the normative theories that are being evaluated, the same point may very well be extended to Kantian or utilitarian ethics. As argued above, it is unlikely that the average business person spends much time worrying about whether a particular decision is based on Kantian or utilitarian grounds. The criticism is that '[f]ar too many business ethicists have occupied a rarefied high ground, removed from the real concerns of and real-world problems of the vast majority of managers. They have been too preoccupied with… abstract theorizing, and with prescriptions that apply only remotely to managerial practices' (Stark, 1993: 38). Or, as one respondent stated during a focus group session in a recent study[24] designed to improve the teaching of business ethics to accounting students: 'We are not philosophy students and don't forget that. We have a whole different mindset to philosophy people, and if you are going to treat us like philosophy people, we are going to switch off' (Woermann & Hattingh, 2008: 9).

It must also be noted that Pamental's example mirrors the type of criticism that a descriptive business ethicist might direct at a normative business ethicist (see footnote 7). Nevertheless, the criticism should be addressed, as it does raise an important issue, namely: how far can one veer into the direction of abstract rules and principles before losing connection to the real world of business? Although philosophers can undoubtedly contribute good arguments from the seminar room, such arguments will be useless if they do not translate into the language of the boardroom (Parker 1998b: 283). As such, business ethicists must move away from 'armchair applied ethics' and do some leg-work (Sorell, 1998: 19) in order to familiarise themselves with the practitioner's concerns.

4.2.3. The context of moral decision-making is not taken into consideration

A third and last issue identified by Pamental (1991) concerns the application of normative theories in the business context: successfully applying moral theory assumes both the ability to engage in abstract thought, and to remain completely rational in all situations (Furman, 1990). Most ethics training programmes are, therefore, premised on the idea that business practitioners are autonomous individuals who freely choose their value orientations, whilst simultaneously remaining committed

[24] This study (which was conducted by the Department of Philosophy, Stellenbosch University) compares the experiences of students from three South African universities with regard to their business ethics education. Students completed a survey and attended focus groups, and in depth interviews were conducted with lecturers, members of the South African Institute of Chartered Accounting (SAICA), and a member of EthicSA. The goal of the research was to identify current strengths and challenges in business ethics education, in order to propose guidelines for teaching business ethics.

to the organisational goals (Willmott, 1998: 85). Three factors counter this objective attitude within an applied context: firstly, business students and practitioners are often taught to be 'practical' and 'make the right decision'. This presumes the direct opposite of abstract, contextless thought processes. Secondly, the socialisation process often introduces cultural pressures in the workplace, which undermine one's ability to act objectively. Lastly, abstract, objective thought is also undermined by the systemic pressures which characterise the business environment. Such pressures include the amount of resources pumped into a project, tight deadlines etc. This serves to focus the attention of business people on the immediate job requirements. According to Stark (in Sorrell, 1998: 18), business ethicists will only be successful if they turn from the question regarding the motivation of ethical practices, to the principles that should guide practitioners in the face of competing business considerations.

In conclusion, one can argue that virtue ethics can, in principle, avoid the alienation problem. This is because the approach emphasises virtues above formal rules and principles, takes the moral character of agents into account, and stresses the context in which moral decision-making takes place. Virtue ethics, therefore, holds several advantages for business ethics. However, as argued in section 3.2.3., virtue ethics runs the risk of sliding into a 'born-again' communitarian position, if uncritically applied. In such cases, the individual discretion and judgement needed to make ethical decisions is sacrificed in favour of decisions that reflect the status quo. In an organisational context, the effects of a communitarian thinking can lead to groupthink, a phenomena which promotes cohesion and consensus at the expense of critical thought. This may lead to disastrous consequences, and necessitates an investigation of the relation between groupthink and unethical corporate behaviour (see Sims, 1992).

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, the standard normative tale was presented and evaluated. The chapter commenced with a short description of the two fields of business ethics – namely the descriptive or empirical field, and the prescriptive or normative field. After a brief motivation for why the study would constitute an evaluation of the normative field of business ethics, the standard normative tale (comprised of utilitarianism, Kantian ethics and virtue ethics) was introduced and evaluated. Next, the depiction of this tale in the business ethics literature was introduced and critiqued. The importance of this step was motivated on the grounds that the presentation of these normative ethical theories influences the perceptions that business students have regarding the nature of ethical decision-making. As a last step, the success with which the standard normative tale can help

practitioners deal with ethical problems was investigated. The overall conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that the standard normative tale presents several deficiencies on the theoretical level, on the level of presentation, and on the level of application.

On the level of ethical theory, it was argued that utilitarianism and Kantian ethics emphasise procedure at the expense of substance, and that not one of the three normative theories can effectively deal with the relationship between individuals and society (including the manner in which moral beliefs are thought to be constituted in institutions such as organisations). On the level of presentation, it was firstly argued that the scope of the standard normative tale does not account for 20th century philosophy. Ancient philosophy (Aristotle) and modern philosophy (Kant, Bentham, and Mill) constitute the basic normative picture. Secondly, it was argued that the way in which the normative theories are presented in the applied literature shows a gross simplification of the substantive content of these theories. Related to this critique is the fact that the theories are often presented in terms of easy-to-follow-and-apply rules or principles. Ethical thinking and decision-making are, thus, reduced to instrumental or procedural reasoning. On the level of application, it was shown that distilling ethical decision-making to abstract principles and rules also often holds little value for practitioners; and, moreover, lead to the alienation problem. Even virtue ethics (when given a communitarian slant) leads to problems in practice, as focusing on the status quo is often not conducive to making good ethical decisions.

Much of the critique highlighted in this chapter deals with the consequence of what happens when we push 'decision, judgement and ultimately ethics until they tell us what they have to contain': ethics becomes dominated by a type of machine logic, which simply ignores the problems (Parker, 1998b: 293). Applying this logic to business means that ethics becomes a strategy for helping managers to formulate moral rules, which – instead of promoting ethical action – serves to undermine the basis of morality (interpretation of Bauman in ten Bos, 1997: 1008; 1009). According to Bauman (1993: 68), moral sentiments cannot be tamed and domesticated 'through lodging them safely in a straitjacket of formal (or formalizable) rules.' This leads us to the conclusion that just as modernity could not guarantee progress, ethics can also not guarantee the good (Parker, 1998b: 295). This type of critique is not meant to completely discredit the standard normative tale, but does force us to rethink the *status* of this tale, particular in terms of the purported value that it holds for business ethics. In other words, our questioning must be directed beyond the moral certainties that prevent us from contemplating the ethical. Parker (289) sums up this sentiment as follows:

> The warm embrace given to ethics – through professorships in business schools, conference papers, journals, course designs, books… – could all too rapidly turn to suffocation unless we allow ethics some room to breathe. Perhaps it would be better to open a window.

In opening a window on the normative field of business ethics, we must take note of positions that promote ethical decision-making that can account for the complexities that characterise our embedded positions in the world. Furthermore, we must seek out positions that have dispelled the illusion that there is a vantage point from which the ethical horison becomes clear. This study is dedicated to the exposition of two such positions, namely deconstruction (which, broadly-speaking, can be identified as a postmodern philosophical position); and, critical complexity theory (which, although not born out of philosophy, nevertheless, holds several important philosophical implications regarding the nature of humans, the world, and ethics). However, before analysing the main tenets and specific normative implications that deconstruction and critical complexity hold for our understanding of ethics, it is firstly necessary to give a broad overview of postmodern philosophy. The importance of this step lies in the *general* challenge that it poses to the standard normative tale. As such, chapter two, in which postmodernism is introduced as an alternative tale for normative ethics, paves the way for the more concrete and specific discussion to follow in later chapters.

Chapter 2

An Alternative Tale for Business Ethics

1. Introduction

Throughout chapter one, we have seen that business ethics (conceived of as a formal subject or enterprise) is ineffective when instrumentalised in a set of formal prescriptions and procedures. In the recent study designed to improve the teaching of business ethics to accounting students (mentioned in chapter one, footnote 24), students were asked during focus group sessions what they believed to be the main goal of business ethics. It is indicative that none of the respondents mentioned the internalisation of formal prescriptions and procedures as the goal of a business ethics education. Rather, responses that indicated the value of a 'broader education' (see Verstraeten, 2000) were popular. For example, one respondent said that the goal of business ethics is 'to get someone to start thinking critically – it motivates students to ask why we are here… [Business ethics focuses on] more than just money or more than just enjoying life.' Another respondent echoed these sentiments saying that business ethics is about developing a 'conscious lifestyle' (Woermann & Hattingh, 2008: 6-7).

Several students also exhibited positive attitudes regarding courses in business ethics. The reasons for these positive attitudes echoed (what they determined to be) the goal of a business ethics education. Personal reasons that were offered in this regard included the perception that business ethics 'helps you to think' and 'brings the world of ethics closer to home and lets you look at yourself, [and] critique your own decision…'; whereas professional reasons included the perception that 'ethics is a very integral part of being an accountant, especially with more reliance on good information in the capitalistic markets today'; and, that 'without due trust in the integrity of our professionals, we have little reason for them' (8).

What these responses have in common is the view that business ethics is primarily concerned with – what Painter-Morland (2008: 237) calls – 'the enhancement of life'. As the title of her book, *Business Ethics as Practice: Ethics as the Everyday Business of Business* suggests, Painter-Morland begins with the view that, in order to be effective, ethics should become an integral part of business. When ethics is seen as part of business practice – rather than an afterthought to business-as-usual – our understanding of business ethics also shifts from ethics as a mere insurance policy or compliance model, to ethics as a careful (and continuous) consideration of how we wish to live and

who we want to be (2). It is ultimately this goal that business ethicists should advance in their work. In this chapter, an alternative model for business ethics (one which takes cognisance of the developments in postmodern philosophy) is introduced, as it is postulated that postmodern philosophy can contribute to the agenda of business, defined as the enhancement of life. As stated in the conclusion of the previous chapter, a discussion on postmodernism also serves as a general introduction to the discussions to follow. In chapter three, it will become clear that the postmodern position presents us with a more complex view on ethics, and it is specifically this ethical complexity that forms a central focus of this study. In chapters four and five, the idea of ethical complexity is elaborated upon at the hand of Derrida's deconstructive ethics. As such, this broad introduction (and the implications that follow from it) paves the way for more nuanced and in depth analyses in subsequent chapters.

There are many different interpretations of postmodernism, and in the first section of the analysis, a formal classification of postmodernism will be attempted. However, in order to introduce the analysis, it is necessary to briefly distinguish between two opposing views of postmodernism. The first view is referred to as 'sceptical postmodernism', which is the perspective that 'all interpretations of phenomena are equally valid' (Kilduff & Mehra, 1997: 455). Protagonists of this perspective view the world as so complicated that prediction and causality are irrelevant. On this take, we are left with, what Rosenau (1992: 15) terms 'a pessimistic, negative, gloomy' assessment of social science. In contrast to sceptical postmodernism, 'affirmative postmodernists' (who support the second view of postmodernism) are of the opinion that not all texts are 'equally valid or valuable' (Kilduff & Mehra, 1997: 455). It is worthwhile to note that, contrary to the opinion of his critics, the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida (1988a: 146), supports this latter view, as is evident from the following citation: 'it should be possible to invoke rules of competence, criteria of discussion and of consensus, good faith, lucidity, rigor, criticism, and pedagogy.' Since this study is largely informed by a Derridean perspective, affirmative postmodernism will be taken as a starting point for this analysis.

The chapter proceeds as follows: In the first section, post(-)modern and post-structural ideas are introduced, with the intent of providing a theoretical framework for the discussion. Post(-)modernism and post-structuralism are explored at the hand of the analytic distinctions made between these terms (only to show that such distinctions cannot hold definitely), as well as in terms of how these ideas challenge and respond to modernist and structuralist ideologies. In the second section, the distinction between the descriptive and normative fields of business ethics (introduced at the beginning of chapter one) is revisited, in order to show that such a distinction collapses if one

takes seriously the insights gleaned from the discussion on postmodernism. In the third section, an overview is provided of the business ethics and organisation studies literature that deals with the question of postmodernism in these fields. These texts make little substantive reference to the work of individual postmodernists (and of how these ideas can be applied to business ethics). Rather, these texts address the meta-question of whether it is useful or not to import postmodern ideas (per se) into business ethics and organisation studies. Critical commentary on the analysis undertaken during the course of the chapter follows in the fourth section. In the concluding section, the criticisms against the standard normative tale (which were raised in the previous chapter) are addressed, with reference to the characteristics of a postmodern ethics. The implications that these characteristics hold for the practice of business ethics are also elaborated upon.

2. Post(-)modern and post-structural roots

'Postmodernism' is a very broad term, designating a number of developments in various fields. Indeed, postmodernism is quite the buzzword, often denoting a state where everything is possible, but nothing is certain (Havel, 1994). This, however, is not a helpful basis for undertaking an analysis of postmodernism, and, therefore, some (provisional) categories must be constructed, despite the fact that some (like Featherstone, 1988: 207) claim that 'there may be as many postmodernisms as there are postmodernists.' One such categorisation strategy is to draw analytic distinctions between the various movements that are generally included under the banner of postmodernism; whereas a second strategy involves studying postmodernism as a response to modernism, and, from there, determining certain features that characterise postmodern positions. Both these strategies will be employed in this section.

2.1. Analytic distinctions

According to Easthope (2001: 17), three main uses of the term 'postmodernism' can be identified: one current in art history and architecture, a second in philosophy, and a third in a more general account of contemporary culture. The term 'postmodernism' first appeared in the late 1960s, but was popularised in Charles Jencks's book, entitled *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1975) (Easthope, 2001: 17). In this book, Jencks contrasts the postmodern architectural style, which is typified by asymmetrical and decentred buildings, with modernist buildings, which are designed around the centre (18). This decentred and anti-foundational approach is also promulgated in what is commonly recognised as the 'most powerful theoretical expression' (Sim, 2001: 3) of

philosophical postmodernism, namely Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report of Knowledge* (1984).

During the 1980s, sociologists further differentiated between the terms 'postmodernism' and 'post-structuralism'[25]. According to this categorisation, post-structuralists (such as Derrida and Foucault) tend to concentrate on the work of language and discourse, whereas postmodernists (such as Baudrillard and Lyotard) 'analyse the contemporary social conditions of an epoch' or 'concentrate on the theoretical milieu which has developed to sustain these conditions as a response, or a variety of responses, to modernism' (Linstead, 2004b: 3). Parker (1992) distinguishes between these two understandings of the term 'postmodernism' by employing a hyphen: postmodernism as a signifier of a historical periodisation is written with a hyphen (post-modernism); whereas postmodernism as a theoretical perspective is written without the hyphen (postmodernism)[26] (see Linstead, 2004b: 3; Hassard, 1993: 2).

John Hassard (1993: 2) further elaborates on this latter categorisation, stating that the goal of post-modernism (as an epoch) is 'to identify features of the external world that support the hypothesis that society is moving towards a new postmodern era.' Although social and economic structures are viewed as fragmented across diverse networks (3), this group of post-modernists still support 'the realist notion that we simply need to find the right way of describing the world 'out there'' (2). In contrast to this view, Hassard (3) maintains that postmodernism (as an epistemology) reflects post-structural developments. Here, the task of postmodernism 'is to recognize [the] elusive nature of language, but never with the aim of creating a meta-discourse to explain all language forms', since the idea of a final structure is debunked as a myth'[27].

Stephen Linstead (2004b: 3), however, warns that the above distinctions are not hard and fast, because despite family resemblances, many differences prevail under the post(-) modern and post-structural writers. Adding to this difficulty is the fact that most of the key figures (such as Derrida, Foucault and Baudrillard) who typify these movements, have renounced the labels given to them, and even the terms that they themselves have coined. This is not a frivolous or rhetorical move, but shows a genuine concern for labelling and 'the deadening effects which reduce the multiplicity,

[25] This distinction has become popular in organisation studies.
[26] Hassard (1993: 2) points to a similar distinction in Bauman's (1988a, 1988b) work, where post-modernism is identified as a 'postmodern sociology', and postmodernism is associated with 'a sociology of postmodernity'.
[27] Hassard's distinction between post-modernism as an epoch and postmodernism as an epistemology corresponds with Morin's (2007) views on restricted complexity and general complexity, as described in the introduction of chapter three. For a more in depth discussion on the implications of Hassard's distinction, see section 5.

paradox and struggle with ideas to a series of homogenous 'positions'' (4). For this reason, Linstead (3; 5) wearily treats postmodernism as encompassing post-structuralism. The same cautious categorisation will be used in the context of this study.

2.2. (Anti)ideological distinctions

2.2.1. Postmodernism as para-modernism

Before concluding this introduction to postmodernism/post-structuralism, a second (arguably more common) categorisation strategy will also be considered, in the hope that such a strategy can help us to gain more of a feel for the agenda of postmodernism/post-structuralism. Typically, this strategy involves viewing postmodernism/post-structuralism as both a rejection of the 'grand narratives' of modernism (Lyotard, 1984), and of Ferdinand Saussure's (1960) structuralist view that language is a relatively stable system of signs that can yield predictable responses. In this regard, Huyssen (1986: 209) writes:

> if poststructuralism can be seen as the *revenant* of modernism in the guise of theory, then that would also be precisely what makes it postmodern. It is a postmodernism that… in some cases, is fully aware of modernism's limitations and failed ambitions.

This citation characterises postmodernism as a response to 'modernist exhaustion' (Calás & Smircich, 1999: 652). The postmodern movement, however, should not be seen as a linear unfolding of events. The postmodern, as Lyotard (in Linstead, 2004b: 4) maintains, is that which comes *before* the modern. Linstead (2004b: 4) interprets this as meaning that the postmodern simultaneously precedes the modern, yet is also something that can only be understood through and after the modern. The nature of human experience has always been complex, yet different epochs dealt with this complexity in different ways: whereas pre-modern societies responded to this complexity through myth, magic and religion; modern societies viewed the world as being guided by rationality, logic, order and scientific objectivity. The belief was that if we could attain knowledge of the inner workings of nature, we would be able to control (and resolve) this complexity. Postmodernists, on the other hand, embrace this complexity; and, through historical analysis, reveal the 'reductions, aporia, hidden oppositions and binaries and other inevitable representational inadequacies' (4-5) upon which modernist assumptions are based. Postmodernists, therefore, attempt to uncover the postmodern *within* the structures of modernity. In this regard, Linstead (5) writes that 'the roots of postmodernism lie alongside the roots of modernism.' Or,

otherwise stated, whereas the modernist movement focuses on the centre, the postmodernist movement focuses on the margins. The postmodern is therefore the '*para-modern*' or '*paratheory*', which:

> looks for the fissures in [the] cosy state of [modernist] affairs, the failures, the immanences, the bursts of energy, the collapses, the silences and the refusals of the unsaid and the non-known to become the said or the known (5).

This argument clearly debunks the common accusations that postmodernism has no history. Postmodernists think history differently, in order to highlight the ways in which 'history lives in and exerts pressure on its recreation in the present' (2). On this take, it is wrong to view postmodernism 'as just another anti-modern intellectual current' (Rosenau, 1992: 169). Rather, affirmative postmodernists engage with tradition so as to undermine the solid foundation and great Truths of modernism, and to break down institutional, social, and disciplinary boundaries in order to give a voice to those who are not represented in the dominant discourse (Giroux, 1992: 56). Postmodernism can, therefore, also be seen as a political movement which seeks to destabilise powerful entrenched interests, and, thereby, challenge the status quo (Kilduff & Mehra, 1997: 460). In fact, Sim (2001: 4) notes that a common feature shared by most postmodernists is 'an almost reflexive dislike of authority', accompanied by a gesture of scepticism and an anti-foundational bias.

Apart from these three common features identified by Sim, many postmodernists also share some other basic ideas, including an interest in the crisis of representation, the provisionality of meaning, reflexivity, and the decentering of the subject. These ideas will only be dealt with briefly here, as more attention will be given to these postmodern problematics in the following chapters.

2.2.2. Four basic postmodernist ideas

The crisis of representation refers to the postmodernist view that a theory-neutral observation language is impossible (Hassard, 1993: 11). Pure thought cannot be represented in a continuous and unproblematic fashion in speech (an ideal designated by the term 'phonocentrism'). Rather than being simply representative, thought *constitutes* us. In other words, thinking is about living in different ways – not about gaining direct access to reality (Dillon, 2000: 3). This implies that 'there is no methodology capable of achieving an unmediated, objective representation of the facts' (Kilduff & Mehra, 1997: 464; see Willmott, 1998). Whatever counts as 'facts' or 'truths' are, in the

words of Friedrich Nietzsche (1995: 92), 'illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions'. On Kilduff and Mehra's (1997: 463) interpretation, this means that:

> Truth is not something that inheres in nature; it is rooted in conventions fabricated by humans… Each linguistic community, and even each individual, can potentially perceive the truth about the world differently.

What the above implies is that meaning is provisional. Any attempt at fixing 'truth' represents a 'professional self-justification' (Hassard, 1993: 12); which, according to Lyotard (1984), has the character of a 'little narrative' (*petit récit*) (Sim, 2001: 8). These little narratives can also be viewed as language games embodying a particular set of knowledge criteria. Knowledge is embedded in a number of diverse discourses each with its own rules and structures, and no one discourse is privileged. The postmodern condition is, therefore, characterised by diversity and conflict (Hassard, 1993: 9). On this view, professional self-justification – or doing science – involves a form of 'serious play' through which we make value judgements on a case-by-case basis, and through which we 'seek to oppose the moves and positions of other players while advancing our own positions' (10; see Lyotard & Thebaud, 1985). Knowledge and texts 'represent a series of choices concerning how arguments should be presented, and these choices are embodied in the text' (Kilduff & Mehra, 1997: 465). In this regard, the work of the postmodern writer is to violate the norms and destabilise the language games in order to show that knowledge is not governed by pre-established rules (Lyotard, 1984: 81).

Nowhere is the insight regarding the provisionality of meaning and knowledge more prevalent than in the writings of Derrida. Derrida deconstructs Saussure's system of language, in order to show how signification is the result of a constant deferral of meaning from one linguistic unit to another (Derrida, 1976). There is no original core of signification: all meaning is already mediated through signifiers that are differentiated from one another. Meaning, therefore, resides in the relations between words and concepts, and not in some intrinsic property (see chapter four, 2.2.2). This again affirms the idea that, contrary to modernist beliefs, there is no stable form of phenomena (which our ideas and theories capture in a natural, intuitive way). This insight on the nature of language is well-illustrated in the following citation taken from the carnivalesque literature of the Russian scholar, Mikhail Bakhtin (1984: 202):

> For the word is not a material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternallly fickle medium of dialogic interaction. It never gravitates towards a single conscience or a single voice. The

> life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation. In this process the word does not forget its own path and cannot completely free itself from the power of these concrete contexts into which it has entered.

However, even if language and meaning is best described as 'the eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction', Derrida (1988a: 150-151) (as with Lyotard) allows for the relative stability of contexts of interaction. Derrida writes that in putting into doubt the possibility of the values and norms that guide our perceptions of truth, he is not denying that we should submit to the norms of pragmatically-determined contexts, only that we should account for the perceived stability of such practices (a stability which is inevitably characterised by historicity, non-naturalness, ethics, politics and institutionality).

This last point captures something of the postmodern attitude of reflexivity. The postmodern approach to knowledge means that 'we must possess the ability to be critical or suspicious of our own intellectual assumptions' (interpretation of Lawson in Hassard, 1993: 12). Postmodern writers employ various strategies (such as erasure, double writing, irony, puns, the use of expressions that are nonsensical in traditional conventions, paradoxes, and so forth) to focus attention on the provisionality of knowledge, and thereby to undermine the view of knowledge 'as a prestigious and objective estate divorced from the mundane activities of everyday life' (Hassard, 1993: 13). Not only does this reflexive view characterise the postmodern approach to knowledge, but also of how postmodernists view humans and human agency.

The modernist view of human agency is founded upon a 'personal, subjective core of awareness in which actions and emotions are coordinated from a knowing self' (15). This view, where '[t]he agent acts within its own dynamic presence' (15) in known as logocentrism (Derrida, 1976; 1978a). In the postmodern tradition, this stable, monolithic self is replaced by the 'image of a dynamic, differentiated self', where the structure of self-concept is viewed as 'complex and multifaceted and the process of self-conception as active and fluid' (Seabright & Kurke, 1997: 99). This postmodern structure of self-concept is aptly described in the anthropologist, Plessner's (1972: 160) dictum: 'I am, but do not possess myself'; whereas the postmodern process of self-conception is captured by Bloch's (1969; epigraph) reply to Plessner's dictum: 'That is why we must become.'

Before concluding this section, a caveat is necessary. The postmodern ideas described above (namely, the crisis of representation, the provisionality of meaning, an emphasis on reflexivity, and

the decentering of the subject) have been explained at the hand of Nietzsche's view on truth, Lyotard's rejection of grand narratives, and Derrida's view on language. This selective reading by no means exhausts the body of ideas presented by these philosophers, nor does it represent a unanimous view espoused by all postmodernists. No reference in this analysis of postmodern thought was made to Gilles Deleuze's eclectic philosophical tomes or his work on the radical relationality of bodies; Michel Foucault's treatment of power relations; Henri-Louise Bergson's work on time, intuition, creativity and virtuality; Georges Bataille's work on desire and transgression; or, to the discussions on post-feminism by Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler (to mention but a few other postmodern philosophers). Any attempt at giving a comprehensive analysis of postmodernism, will always fail as postmodern thought 'cannot be captured in a summary definition' (Dillon, 2000: 2). Not only can postmodern ideas not be captured in succinct or concise definitions, but we should also (in the spirit of postmodernism) be critical of our own assumptions regarding these ideas. As Richard Feynman (2005: 396) once wrote in a letter to Armando Garcia J.: 'I was born not knowing and have had only a little time to change that here and there.'

3. Revisiting the tale of two cities: the sprawling landscape of business ethics

At the beginning of chapter one, the normative and descriptive fields of business ethics were defined. Although the focus of this study has thus far been on the normative approach to business ethics, it should be clear at this juncture that the distinction between the two fields (although alive and well in practice) is conceptually problematic. The reasons for this are twofold: firstly, since knowledge is provisional, our descriptions of the world do not accord with an *a priori* view of reality, but involves certain choices of how to portray reality. This means that all our decisions and actions are characterised by a normative dimension. Secondly, normative considerations cannot be viewed in abstract-terms (or in relation to an Ideal realm), but must be considered within specific practices and language games. In other words, our decisions and actions are contextually-defined. The above implies that any account of human behaviour will be characterised by both a descriptive and a normative dimension, and that the descriptive and normative dimensions are interrelated. This insight presents a challenge to the manner in which both the descriptive and the normative fields of business ethics are characterised. Below follows a more in depth discussion of the implications of this challenge.

3.1. Problematising the fact-value distinction: an argument against objective truths

The business ethicist, Hugh Willmott (1998: 80), explicitly places the fact-value distinction – i.e. the idea that the description of what ethics *is* can be neatly separated from our value judgements – into doubt. His argument is as follows (80): if our ethical models cannot be justified on epistemological or ontological grounds, then the very idea of descriptive ethics is untenable. In other words, the category of a purely descriptive ethics is only coherent if ethics can provide us with descriptions of that which exists prior to our interpretations, and, therefore, independently of language (79). However, as Rorty (1979) reminds us, we do not hold a mirror up to nature. Knowledge is always, already interpreted knowledge; and our interpretations are, by definition, contextual, temporal, and limited constructions. As a result, the category of descriptive ethics collapses into normative ethics, and any attempt at pursuing 'truth for its own sake' always translates into:

> a tacit quest for something more than truth, for other values may have been obscured, denied, and perhaps even forbidden… In this sense, 'truth for its own sake' is a crypto-ethic of concealment of other substantive values (Gouldner, 1973: 65).

Willmott (1998: 80) argues that, as ethicists, merely acknowledging the normative component is not enough. We should also engage in analytical ethics, which, more than 'simply voicing an evaluation or judgement of an issue… prompts reflection on the basis of such judgement'. More specifically, he maintains that 'the 'analytical ethics' of post-structuralism has a normative thrust as it challenges the coherence of 'descriptive ethics'.' He states that poststructuralist thinking is particularly helpful 'in re-membering the connectedness of what appears to be antimonies – such as 'good' and 'evil', 'fact' and 'value' or 'self' and 'other'' (87). Willmott's reinscription of the normative field, therefore, resonates well with a poststructuralist position.

3.2. An argument in defence of 'thicker' descriptions

The later Parker[28] (1998b: 284) takes a different view with regard to the collapse of the fact-value distinction. He argues that, if normativity pervades every decision and action, then every element (and description) of organisational life is construed as analytically inseparable from the

[28] Parker's earlier work (referenced in sections four and five) endorses critical modernism and is explicitly opposed to postmodernism. However, as will be argued in this section, his later stance is compatible with a postmodern position. Therefore, to avoid confusion, the analysis makes specific reference to the earlier and later Parker, in order to distinguish between these ideological differences.

philosopher's ethics. As a result, ethics becomes thoroughly 'sociologized', as it is drawn from the lofty ivory tower of academia into the flow of the ordinary (284). Parker argues that since the ethical cannot claim a special position anywhere, one should 'attempt to go beyond any metaphysics of good and evil and gesture at relativism in the interests of a *thicker description'* (285; my italics).

Instead of providing prescriptive arguments for people's actions, Parker contemplates the merits of engaging more intensely on the descriptive level, in order to see how people live, and how they draw conclusions concerning right and wrong. The drawback of this approach is that such an analysis cannot yield general results, because conceptions of right and wrong vary in, and between, contexts. This leads to what Kilduff and Mehra (1997: 465) term the 'crisis of generalizability'. The outcome of this strategy is that it 'squeezes [ethics] so flat that it gets everywhere, and hence is really nowhere' (Parker, 1998b: 294). Decisions and judgements reverberate through endless networks, making it impossible for us to say: here is an instance of ethical action, there is not.

To prevent such a conclusion, Parker (295) suggests that we should embrace the paradox that being ethical may mean giving up on ethics. This strategy presents a more provisional and contextual way of thinking about ethics, as it focuses on the ambivalence of actions and judgements. This, according to Parker (295), might mean that we need to reassess the manner in which business ethics questions are asked, and possibly argue that such questions are best left unanswered. Cronbach (1986: 91) summarises this sentiment as follows: 'Social science is cumulative, not in possessing ever-more refined answers about fixed questions, but in possessing an ever-richer repertoire of questions.'

Although not explicitly mentioned, Parker's position is not incompatible with a postmodern position. In an earlier article (referenced extensively in sections 4 and 5), Parker (1993: 212) argues against such a position, stating that a postmodern epistemology distracts us 'from rigorous analysis of organizational changes within global capitalism'. However, in the article cited in this section, Parker (1998b: 295) supports forms of thought that 'encourages us to question our deeply felt beliefs and not merely wrap us in certainties that prevent us from thinking the absurd.' According to Jones (2003: 227), Parker's agenda can be explained as an attempt to prioritise questions of axiology, position, ethics, and politics over ontology and epistemology. Such goals resonate well with postmodern thinking.

3.3. Evaluation

The difference between Willmott's (1998) and Parker's (1998b) views illustrates the wide divisions that exist regarding how 'we should describe theorizing and theorize description' (Parker, 1998a: 4). The former strategy is represented by Willmott's (1998) approach, where emphasis is placed on a close examination of 'texts' in contemporary social sciences, in order to unveil the normative assumptions that are smuggled into seemingly neutral descriptions. The latter strategy is more in line with Parker's (1998b) own attempt at foregrounding empirical contexts (including the local, institutional and historical context), in order to develop thicker descriptions of our practices.

As stated above, both these positions are compatible with postmodern positions, which – unlike the standard normative tale discussed in chapter one – are sensitive to interpretations that do not attempt to fix the definition of ethics. Furthermore, Willmott's and Parker's arguments hold important implications for the circumscription of business ethics – either as a normative, or as a descriptive field. Firstly, the description of the normative approach to business ethics is challenged if we reposition ethics in 'the flow of the ordinary'. The reason for this is because our decisions and actions become thoroughly contextualised, which means that abstract, ideal, prescriptive moral judgements may prove insufficient as a basis for evaluating and critiquing corporate actions. Furthermore, the idea that moral agents make free, informed, and responsible choices on the basis of these principles alone is hardly credible. This is because the actions of moral agents are influenced and limited by contextual factors, and because moral agents are rationally-bounded i.e. we are limited by the information that we have, by our cognitive capacity, and by the amount of time that we have to make decisions.

Secondly, and with reference to descriptive approach, it should be clear that moral agents function in complex environments. The idea that we can obtain objective knowledge about the social world, and the idea that the social world is inherently stable and certain – in fact so certain that we can give accurate explanations and predictions of human behaviour – are predicated on a functionalist paradigm, which has long been discredited. Whilst the strength of the descriptive approach lies in its consideration of the impact of external determinants on human behaviour, the objectivist paradigm within which many social scientists work is undermined by Willmott's argument.

If neither the traditional circumscription of the normative nor the descriptive approach to business ethics ring true to our lived experiences, it seems that this classification is not very useful at a practical level. Furthermore, at the beginning of section 3 it was stated that it is difficult to draw

hard and fast distinctions between postmodern positions that emphasise context (Parker's (1998b) standpoint) and post-structural positions that emphasise language and text (Willmott's (1998) standpoint). In this regard, Linstead (2004b: 4) offers Derrida's work as an example. Derrida is renowned for his work on language and textual analysis. However, Linstead argues that there has always been an implicit political dimension in Derrida's work, which became much more explicit during the 1990s. Here we see how textual analysis becomes inextricably interwoven with social context, to the point where the distinction between text and context, or post-structuralism and postmodernism no longer proves helpful. For this reason, the approach that will be followed in this study is one that shows sensitivity for social context, whilst also endorsing a close reading of business ethics texts.

4. Postmodern thought in business ethics and organisation studies

The advantage of the approach to postmodernism identified above is that, on this view, postmodernists avoid the problems of relativism (associated with sceptical postmodernism) and universalism (associated with modernism). This is because affirmative postmodernists still work with principles, rules and standards, whilst denying these principles, rules and standards a universal and incontestable status. As such, affirmative postmodernists recognise, and take cognisance of, both the contextual contingencies that define business practices, and the particularity of the normative assumptions that underlie these practices. Affirmative postmodernists, therefore, support a more complex understanding of ethics. In attempting to account for the complexities of our realities, Bauman (1993: 15) argues that the postmodern vantage point is not likely to make life easier. At most, it can dream of making life 'a bit more *moral*.' Wakefield (1990: 151) expresses a similar sentiment. He writes (in reference to the postmodern discourse) that:

> we find ourselves left with something more modest, but perhaps more urgent… That is the task, not of finding ends, solutions and finalities, but of living in a world from which these privileges and certainties have been withdrawn.

This modest, but hopeful, agenda for a postmodern ethics is not shared by all. With regard to business ethics and organisation studies, a cursory glance at the extant literature shows that a good many authors do not hold out much hope for employing a productive postmodernism in the fields of business ethics and organisation studies. Below follows a summary of two articles written by Clarence Walton and Andrew Gustafson for a special issue of *Business Ethics Quarterly*, in which the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating postmodern ideas into business ethics is debated.

Corresponding viewpoints of prominent organisational theorists are also presented in the footnotes at relevant points in the analysis.

4.1. Walton's view of postmodernism and business ethics

In his article entitled, 'Business ethics and postmodernism: a dangerous dalliance', Walton (1993) shows scepticism regarding the value of introducing postmodern ideas to business ethics. Indeed, he argues that an overview of the literature suggests that postmodernism 'is more threat than promise to the healthy development of business ethics' (286). Before looking at the criticisms against a postmodernist business ethics, it is important to firstly give a description of Walton's understanding of postmodernism (which is premised on the deconstructive methodology). Walton (286) describes the aims of postmodernism as follows: 'postmodernism seeks to unfix boundaries that conceal domination and authority; to provide an umbrella for diverse ideologies (whose main tilt, incidentally, is to the left); to reorder the present by reordering the past; and, finally, to concentrate mainly on Cartesian theorists in order to expose their defects.'

4.1.1. Postmodern difficulties

The first challenge that Walton identifies with postmodernism is the issue of definitional difficulties. According to Walton, this problematises any attempt at defining postmodernism as an identifiable movement. In this regard, he cites Jameson (1991: 342) – a major American analyst of postmodernism – who states that postmodernists' 'effort of conceptual unification is, to say the least, strikingly inconsistent with the spirit of postmodernism itself', but also adds that Jameson himself later recognised that a theory can 'embrace diverse strands and yet remain a coherent theory' (Walton, 1993: 287). However, for Walton, the point remains that the lack of conceptual clarification regarding both the definition and the content of postmodernism may stretch the limits of tolerance to an unacceptable point[29]. In Walton's (288) words: 'the toleration urged upon ethicians as the primary virtue in moral debate may become its greatest vice.' This is an important

[29] In arguing that postmodernism is characterised by incommensurability and polarisation between competing groups or factions, the organisational theorist, Michael Reed (1993: 177), shares this concern with Walton. According to Reed, postmodernism sets up an absolute choice between foundationalism and relativism, and therein, 'has ignored – or at the very least radically underestimated – the modest, but nonetheless significant, grounded rationality inherent within those intellectual practices, traditions and histories through which the study of organizations has been conducted and developed' (177). As an alternative to postmodernism, Reed (176) is of the opinion that organisation theory is better understood in terms of intellectual, traditional, and narrative practices; and, therefore, suggests a return to older narratives. As an example, he argues that, through critical engagement with the Weberian tradition, we will be able to work through the micro-politics of control and the macro-politics of order so as to further our understanding of the organisation as a strategic institutional site (182).

criticism, which Walton (288) further expands on by citing a number of questions raised by Prangle (1992:208):

> If, in the face of conflict, postmodernism's "categorical imperative" is to respond to others with responsiveness, what is responsiveness? If one should be tolerant of others who do not agree, is this the debater's technique of turning away criticism? Does toleration in the postmodern sense move ethical discussion perilously close to moral indifference? Or to moral subjectivism?

This line of critique will be dealt with in detail in chapter five. At this point, however, we turn to the second problem that Walton (1993: 289) identifies with the postmodern approach, namely that, ultimately, postmodernism revels in a paradox. This is because postmodernism 'does not abandon modernist notions despite its opposition to them. It allows for a description of its essential identity at the same time as it undermines such a rigorous claim to truth.' Walton (289) argues that the essential distinction between the traditional normative tale and the postmodern tale of business ethics rests on the postmodernist's emphasis on the provisional nature of all things as opposed to the modernist's unconditional emphasis on the ethical certainty of things that may transcend common sense, such as prohibitions against rape, murder, and torture. Although not explicitly stated, Walton seems to prefer the modernist approach above the postmodernist approach, which often leaves one performatively powerless (see section 6.2.)

The postmodern emphasis on the provisional and tentative nature of the moral world leads to the third problem (identified by Walton), namely that no universal, external standard of ethical behaviour exists. In other words, no solid base for business ethics can be found, which – for Walton – means that, in principle, all moral judgements must be treated as equally valid. Although such a conception preserves individual autonomy, it becomes impossible to act as an authoritative source on ethical issues. Walton (292) contextualises this point by stating that 'while there are solid reasons to worry about financial capitalism and global corporations, their pathologies will not be addressed effectively by an ethics that, at this level of discussion, treats contradictory moral judgments as equally valid'[30]. This lack of ethical clarity is, according to Walton (293), further

[30]The earlier Parker (1993: 209) takes this line of argument even further in reasoning that, without standards of evaluation, it is not clear in the name of what we are criticising. For Parker, ethics is essentially about saying that 'I think the world would be a better place if such and such were the case' (209).This might mean dealing with contesting ethical-political claims (which, according to Parker (1993), Walton (1993), and Prangle (1992), postmodernists are ill-equipped in doing). Parker (1993: 211) views the epistemological relativity of postmodernism as an 'escape route' in dealing with ethical and political responsibilities, and an excuse for leaving the difficult choices up to others. For this reason, Parker (205; 209) ascribes to a critical modernist perspective (see Habermas, 1987), which can allow for 'rigorous analysis of organizational

compounded by postmodern rhetoric, which revels in puns, irony, gesture and ruse. Postmodern rhetoric distances itself from statements which claim to be either true or false, and instead indulges 'in the virtuosity of performance – a kind of midair tap dance in which…the ground is no longer sought' (Shell, 1989). This raises worrying questions regarding the status of ethical judgements.

Lastly, Walton (1993: 294) argues that whilst 'postmodernist ethicians are skittish about fixed moral standards, they are quite dogmatic in their denunciations of the market economy.' Walton turns the postmodern epithet on the postmodernists themselves urging them to 'examine the margins' (296) before drawing hasty and biased conclusions (that rest on limited evidence) about the evils of capitalism. Although Walton (296) is himself opposed to unfettered market capitalism, he warns that 'in their zeal to make liberal capitalism the incarnation of Mephistopheles, postmodernists have neglected to emphasize one important item: although capitalism is single-mindedly directed towards efficient production… people in a relatively free society can discipline it.' What is needed here is innovative thinking, grounded not in a loud condemnation of capitalism in all of its forms, but rather in an exercise in theory building that rests on a normative basis. Such a normative basis should be able to say something about human rights, as well as immoral, proscribed, and prescribed behaviour. As such, too strong an emphasis on toleration and interpretative autonomy may aid in turning a 'compromising society into a compromised society' (297).

4.1.2. Postmodernism: weaknesses and strengths

Although the above account seems to suggest that Walton (1993: 297) is completely opposed to postmodernism, he also admits that '[m]uch in it is good.' Walton ends his article with a list of strengths and weaknesses regarding the application of postmodernism to business ethics. The weaknesses offer a partial summary of the preceding discussion, and some of these weaknesses include the following propositions (298-299): 1) Postmodernism is good at destroying philosophical

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changes within global capitalism' (Parker, 1993: 212). Parker (205) contrasts critical modernism with comprehensive or systematic modernism (i.e. the position in support of totalising theories) and postmodernism (i.e. positions – typified in the writings of Lyotard and Baudrillard – that express 'incredulity towards any [grand] narratives'). Not included in Parker's critique are positions that emphasise reflexivity (i.e. post-structural positions).

Paul Thompson (1993) is another organisational theorist who rejects the postmodernist viewpoint, in favour of critical modernism. He argues that postmodern interpretations have both limited relevance and lead to distorted application. He attributes these problems to the fact that postmodern approaches designed for literary and cultural purposes, have (away from this context) become 'conceptual catch-alls, conflating quite distinct social processes' (200). As an alternative to the postmodern approaches, Thompson (203) suggest we again take up the 'intellectual tools of the critical tradition of modern theory', as these tools remain indispensible to 'recognis[ing] the differentiation and fragmentation within modernity, while also providing the language that addresses its integrative and macroscopic features' (Best & Kellner, 1991: 258).

positions, but is unable to replace these positions with a consistent philosophy. 2) The postmodern emphasis on tolerance creates ethical indifference and destroys the possibility of establishing objective measures for ethics. 3) The implication that postmodernism is the first movement to show interest for, and stress responsibility towards, the marginalised is nonsense. 4) In denying the existence of external moral rules, postmodernists make moral reality a human construction, which means that we can no longer refute arguments on principle-grounded logic. 5) Postmodernism may very well lead to an aesthetic (as opposed to an ethical) morality. 6) Ethical discussions are severely constrained due to the improper attention given to the contributions made by philosophers in the history of the discourse. 7) Postmodern rhetoric may reduce moral theorists to jargonists in the eyes of other scholars. 8) Deconstructive analyses are not new to postmodernism – in fact, every great thinker has engaged in such analyses.

In contrast to these weaknesses, some of the strengths of postmodernism (as identified by Walton (297-298)) are as follows: 1) Postmodernism extends the definition of what is considered as ethical/unethical by drawing attention to the challenges posed by second-order principles, such as job rights, employee privacy etc. (The counter-argument here is that, in the absence of first order normative principles, morality is reduced to these second-order principles.) 2) The insistence on ethical pluralism encourages people to consider diverse ethical perspectives before making moral judgements. 3) Postmodernism nurtures respect for cultural and value diversity. 4) Tolerance is presented as postmodernism's greatest virtue[31]. 5) Postmodernists avoid making scapegoats of individuals by emphasising contextual issues. 5) The deconstructive technique employed by postmodernists allows for continuous revision and interpretation, which is conducive to decision-making in a complex world. 6) Postmodernists support minority voices (such as feminism). 7) Postmodernism is a constant reminder of the fact that capitalism is flawed, that it has gone wrong in the past, and that it may again go wrong in the future.

4.2. Gustafson takes up the debate

4.2.1. Gustafson engages with Walton

In an article published seven years later, Gustafson (2000) offers a critical commentary on Walton's article on the viability of a postmodern business ethics. He (648) argues that although postmodernism is susceptible to some of the weaknesses identified above, the theory is not

[31] Despite Walton's critique of tolerance, it seems that his attitude towards the postmodern emphasis on tolerance remains ambivalent, as here he presents the focus on tolerance as a strength of postmodernism.

necessarily subject to all these weaknesses. Walton's first criticism, namely 'that postmodernism fails to present an alternative for what it destroys, and does not provide a basis of thinking' (Walton, 1993: 298), does not hold for all forms of postmodern thinking. Indeed, Gustafson (2000: 648) follows Nielsen (1961) in arguing that '[t]here have been many people, explicitly postmodern or otherwise, who have explained various ways of having morality without having any ultimate truths or meanings for the world.' Deconstruction is one such movement that attempts to reinscribe values in 'more powerful, larger, more stratified contexts' (Derrida, 1988a: 146; see chap. 5, sec. 7.1.). Linked to this, is Gustafson's (2000: 649) denial of Walton's assertion that postmodern morality cannot be justified on principle-based grounds: postmodernists do accept, employ, and justify the use of certain principles. This is evidenced by Derrida's concern with justice, Levinas' concern for the Other, and Foucault's focus on freedom, to name but a few examples. As such, Walton's claim that postmodernism necessarily leads to Nietzschean nihilism is also not fair (649).

Another weakness identified by Walton that Gustafson contests, is the idea that the emphasis on tolerance causes ethical indifference. This may be true of certain relativist positions, but many postmodern theorists – such as Levinas or Bauman – are critical of the limits of responsibility, as defined within a modernist perspective, and, instead, argue for 'more responsibility and a louder call to vigilance than any modern theory normally invokes.' (649). Gustafson further argues that postmodernists were successful in drawing attention to the interests of the marginalised and have (to a large degree) revitalised this interest 'by bringing modernity to face its own principles and to show the hypocrisy within modernity itself' (649). Otherwise stated, by highlighting the limits of our knowledge, or ability to know the truth, postmodernism has de-naturalised standard ethical positions. However, Gustafson does concede that, although not necessarily anti-theistic or pagan, postmodernism can – in the very recognition of our limitations – 'bring about a sense of awe and humility, akin to worship' (649).

Gustafson (650) does, however, agree with Walton's claim that postmodern philosophy is jargon-filled, and argues that this may be the primary reason for why postmodernism will not enjoy a large reception in business ethics. But despite this, he is interested in the challenge that Walton brings to the table, namely: 'can we adequately provide a position that can distinctively and reasonably be called "postmodern" that does not devolve into a cover for a particular ideology that is not essentially pagan (non-theistic)?' (650) Gustafson believes that this challenge can indeed be met, and proposes an outline for a postmodern ethics, which follows below.

4.2.2. Gustafson's two-fold hope

Gustafson (2000: 650) argues that the value of postmodernism cannot lie in providing us with a foundational set of principles – a 'one-size-fits-all ethical theory' (see Rasmussen, 1993: 273; Walton, 1993: 386). The value of postmodern philosophy rather lies in posing 'questions that can be used as an ongoing strategy to be used when developing a theory' (Gustafson, 2000: 650) In other words, postmodernists are much better in asking questions, than in providing answers[32]. However, such philosophers are also needed, and if postmodernism experiences a successful uptake in the applied field, its primary value will lie in this ability to pose difficult questions (650).

Gustafson outlines (not very optimistically, he adds!) the following two-fold hope for postmodernism: that it may find an application in the field of business ethics; and that business ethics will, in its appropriation of postmodern philosophy, find a stronger philosophical connection (650). In order to realise this dual hope, Gustafson argues that it is necessary to re-inscribe the status of the field, as a development of, rather than a reaction to, modernism. In justification of this statement he quotes Bauman (1995: 4) who says that the value of postmodernism lies:

> not in the abandoning of characteristically modern moral concerns' [such as equality, justice, suspicion of dogma], but in the rejection of the typically modern ways of going about its moral problems (that is, responding to moral challenges with coercive normative regulation in political practice, and the philosophical search for absolutes, universals and foundations in theory).

The ambiguity that characterises many of the moral dilemmas that impact on business today has been dealt with either in terms of ethical cynicism (which is the outcome of a disappointed optimism in unrestrained enlightenment and trust in human reason), or in terms of what Gustafson (2000: 651) calls a 'healthy temperance'. The latter attitude can be characterised as 'a rugged and flexible desire to find workable solutions, maintaining the regulative ideas of justice, freedom, and equality, while working in a world where these things are virtually impossible' (651). Postmodernists strive towards many of the same goals that characterised modernism. However, they do so without the hope of finding foundations in which to finally ground their efforts. Therefore, Gustafson (653; 656) is of the opinion that:

[32] This view corresponds with the later Parker's (1998b) views in his article 'Against ethics'.

> postmodernist business ethicists need not discontinue the quest for ethics, but their quest is not a quest for certainty, but a tempered quest, a striving for conceptions of ethical behaviour that have a better fit, an ethics that just makes more sense, for an ethics that can work better than other approaches, at least for now… [However], much more work and thinking needs to be done.

In light of the above characterisation, Gustafson (2000: 651-654) proposes the following characteristics of what might be called a 'postmodern business ethics'. Firstly, a postmodern business ethics will be premised on the realisation that one is always a human being, regardless of what role one inhabits. This means that there 'should be no separation between personal and professional ethical behaviour' (652). Secondly, a postmodern business ethics will proceed by narrative, as opposed to abstract theory in which the basis of ethics is formalised. Thirdly, grand, universal narratives will be rejected in favour of coming up with local rules, and building particular pockets of consensus (which are temporally and spatially bound). And, lastly, a postmodern business ethics will acquire a certain degree of plasticity, without adopting a relativistic stance.

5. Evaluating the arguments for and against incorporating postmodernism in business ethics

Much of the preceding analysis developed at the hand of secondary literature – most of which is to be found in the organisational and business ethics literature. This move was intentional, as the point of this analysis was not only to introduce postmodern thought, but also to present an overview of how postmodernism is understood in the social sciences, particularly business ethics and organisation theory. In the section to follow, some of the views espoused by various theorists in the preceding analysis are critically analysed in terms of how these theorists view the theoretical landscape that inform their opinions.

5.1. Distinguishing between systematic modernism, critical modernism, and postmodernism

The critique of modernism presented in this study correlates with the earlier Parker's (1993) view of systematic or comprehensive modernism, defined as a position in support of totalising theories (see footnote 30). This critique translates in a rejection of all universal forms of rationality and ethics. Most of the theorists cited in this chapter are opposed to this view of modernism. However, what should be clear is that a rejection of universal theories does not necessarily translate into support for

postmodern positions. In order to illustrate this point, it is necessary to briefly elaborate on the distinction between systematic modernism, critical modernism, and post(-)modernism.

Hassard (1993: 4) defines the objective of systemic modernism as the attempt 'to facilitate the control of complex and large-scale operations through a range of highly programmed knowledge technologies.' On this definition, it is difficult to see how systemic modernism differs from Hassard's view of post-modernism (as an epoch), which – to recall – is a movement that supports 'the realist notion that we simply need to find the right way of describing the [admittedly complex and fragmented] world 'out there'' (2). Or, more accurately, it is unclear that this view of post-modernism does in fact present us with a postmodern position. It seems that the ideal of universality, or the belief that we can (through the correct technologies) find the perfect means to describe objective reality, is still alive and well. The only thing that has changed is the sophistication of the technologies that must be employed, in order to uncover the mechanisation of the social order.

Critical modernism (see footnote 30), on the other hand, presents a more contextually-sensitive philosophical position. The main contemporary advocate of this position is Jürgen Habermas, who, in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987), analyses the radical critique of reason, which he associates with the paradoxes of self-referential critique (i.e. the position that there is no vantage point from which to criticise Enlightenment rationality outside of critical reason (see sec. 6.2.)) (Fleming, 1996: 169). Because of their support for a radical critique of reason, many post-Enlightenment thinkers and postmodernists are (according to Habermas) unable to provide a sound basis for social critique. McCarthy (1987: ix) argues this point forcefully in the introduction to *Discourse of Modernity*, stating that Habermas is of the opinion that, as a result of the radical critique of reason, 'the epistemological and moral subject has been definitively decentered and the conception of reason linked to it irrevocably desublimated.' According to McCarthy (x), Habermas is very much aware of our essential finitude, but wishes to avoid the consequences of a radical critique of reason. Thus, the strategy that he follows in this book, is to reject '"the paradigm of consciousness" and its associated "philosophy of the subject" in favor of the through-and-through intersubjective paradigm of "communicative action"'(x).

In his *Theory of Communicative Action,* Habermas (1984) explains this paradigm as follows: we are able to recover a form of natural reason – or 'the lost sense of the enlightenment that Kant first revealed to us' (Power in Hassard, 1993: 5) – through experiencing the common sense of ordinary language. Habermas claims that we can recognise a certain sphere of validity through

argumentation, and that this sphere of validity acts as the sole criterion according to which we can judge and critique knowledge claims. Rational argumentation is, therefore, the means through which we can reach consensus. In this regard, Habermas (1984: 17-18) writes:

> Thus the rationality proper to the communicative practice of everyday life points to the practice of argumentation as a court of appeal that makes it possible to continue communicative action with other means when disagreements can no longer be repaired with everyday routines and yet are not to be settled by direct or strategic use of force.

What, therefore, distinguishes the critical modernist approach from the postmodern view, is that critical modernists still work with the regulative idea that an ideal horison of inter-subjective truth can be accessed.

Given this definition of critical modernism, Walton's (1993) belief that we are relatively free to influence the workings of capitalism through an exercise in theory building that rests on a normative basis can be interpreted as corresponding with the project of critical modernism. Organisational theorists such as Thompson (1993), the earlier Parker (1993), and Reed (1993) are explicit in their support of critical modernism, and view critical modernism as a better alternative to systemic modernism and postmodernism. All three these organisational theorists are of the opinion that postmodernists dismiss outright the significantly grounded rationality inherent in practices, in favour of an approach that propagates radical incommensurability and polarisation in, and between, discourses. These theorists are, therefore, also opposed to a radical critique of reason.

5.2. In support of affirmative postmodernism

Such blanket dismissals of postmodernism are not fair. Whilst sceptical postmodernists may portray an ethical cynicism that verges on nihilism, affirmative postmodernists exhibit a healthy temperance in trying to find working solutions in the absence of any fixed truth (see Kilduff & Mehra, 1997; Gustafson, 2000). In this sense, one should be cautious of accepting Parker's (1993), Walton's (1993), Thompson's (1993), or Reed's (1993) conclusion that all moral judgements should be treated as equally valid from a postmodern perspective, simply because there is no firm basis for ethics. In Linstead's (2004a: 177) words: 'just because the terrain of ideas may be problematic, doesn't mean we can't act'. Moreover, we have seen examples in this chapter of both Lyotard's (1984) and Derrida's (1988a) explicit defence of contextually-based perceptions of truth. Gustafson (2000) also reiterates the point that certain postmodern positions can espouse various forms of

morality without referring to ultimate truths, and further argues that postmodernists, such as Derrida, Foucault, and Levinas, can defend their positions on principle-based grounds. On this more nuanced reading, Parker's (1993: 210) project of defending ethical-political claims against the postmodern attempt to put all productive disagreement into question is misguided, or represents – as Linstead (2004a: 177) states (rather more forcefully!) – 'that old modernist *non sequitur* which seems to be based on a misreading of the fable of Buridan's Ass'[33].

Linstead (175) reads these blanket dismissals of postmodernism (mostly in the name of some form of universal, instrumental, or emancipatory rationality) as arrogant attempts to 'take postmodernism back, either as a discursive retraction or in time to a golden age prior to all misunderstanding.' According to him, 'we can't recall... postmodernism because the problem is not with the product and the product is any case not ours to recall.' In this context, he specifically mentions Hassard and Parker's (1993) jointly edited book *Postmodernism and Organizations* (in which Thompson's and Reed's articles also appear) as an example of a project which claims to debunk postmodernism. Linstead (2004a: 174) notes that in this book, he counted twenty-one actual references to Derrida (most of which appear in his own contribution), twenty references to Lyotard, and three references to Deleuze. Parker, on the other hand, is referenced twelve times! Linstead (174) critically describes this project as follows:

> Having effectively mounted its arguments on a *simulacrum* of postmodernism, this *Matrix* of a book ends by dismissing the arguments of simulation, thereby warranting its own reality. Which just goes to show that if you think that everything that happens is real, and everything that is real happens, what can you expect?

Linstead's criticism of Parker's project does not necessarily translate in a support of postmodernism, but does present a challenge to the manner in which postmodern thought has been treated in organisational and (one could also argue, in business ethics) thought. Given this situation, Linstead (174-177) makes an impassioned appeal to return to the primary literature, and to explore the postmodern ideas in their own right, rather than to continue thinking in general frameworks of 'isms'.

[33] Buridan's ass is a paradox in philosophy. It refers to a hypothetical situation wherein an ass, placed exactly in the middle between two stacks of hay of equal size and quality, will starve to death since it cannot make any rational decision to start eating one rather than the other. The paradox is named after the 14th century French philosopher Jean Buridan. (Taken from: Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buridan's_ass)

The strategy followed in chapter four and five is influenced by both Linstead's plea for a more careful appraisal and reading of postmodern ideas, and Gustafson's two-fold hope for business ethics. To recall: Gustafson's two-fold hope for business ethics embodies the dual aims of taking seriously postmodern ideas, whilst still remaining focused on the practical context in which these ideas are enacted. As such, Gustafson's hope calls for a reconciliation of Willmott's (1998) position (where the moral task is described as not only voicing, but also reflecting on moral judgement) and Parker's (1998b) later stance (where he argues in favour of thicker descriptions, so as to re-inscribe ethics as a 'contextual, situational [and] highly specific' practice (Jackall, 1988: 6)).

Both these agendas must be simultaneously followed. This is because if the ethical task is only construed in terms of reflecting on moral judgements, one risks turning ethics into a technology for textual critique, whereby the normative exclusions in discourses are exposed. However, if one views the ethical task as merely producing thicker descriptions of highly-contextual practices, one risks developing a relative and incommensurable view of ethics. Only by simultaneously engaging in textual critique, and in investigating the contexts in which our ethical decisions are enacted, is it possible to develop a productive reading of ethics. Such a reading can account for the norms that guide our relatively stable practices, but prevent these norms from being naturalised and turned into transcendental, categorically-binding rules and principles.

Derrida's deconstructive ethics is an example of a postmodern position that does work on both these fronts. In chapters four and five, Derrida's theory of deconstruction will be explained, and illustrated with specific reference to the implications that this theory holds for our understanding of corporate social responsibility. However, at this juncture it is necessary to provide some general remarks on how the postmodern view of ethics (presented in this chapter) can overcome some of the problems associated with the standard normative tale discussed in chapter one.

6. Postmodern insights: redefining the agenda for business ethics

In this last section, the main tenets of an affirmative postmodern ethics are discussed in terms of the implications that they hold for the ethical task generally, and the business ethics task specifically. This section is also meant to practically illustrate the possibility of finding working solutions to business ethics problems in the absence of fixed truths. This section should, therefore, also be read as a further argument against Parker's (1993), Walton's (1993), Thompson's (1993), and Reed's (1993) view that all moral judgements should be treated as equally valid from a postmodern view, simply because there is no firm basis for ethics. Furthermore, the characteristics and implications

discussed in this section form the basis of the arguments to follow, as both critical complexity and deconstruction build on the type of insights developed in this section.

6.1. Tenet 1: Limited knowledge is not 'any' knowledge

As was seen from the analysis in chapter one, the hallmark of both utilitarianism and deontology is to determine rules that would amount to decision-making procedures for stipulating the right actions in any given case; and, to explicate these rules in a manner that is directly accessible to (and can easily be applied by) everyone[34]. However, what is evident from the analysis undertaken in this chapter is that the hope of uncovering a categorically-binding ethics rests on an outdated and incorrect modernist assumption regarding the nature of reality and human experience. Therefore, as it stands, no normative theory can solve all of one's moral dilemmas or completely define the rules and procedures that will categorically result in moral decisions and actions. Despite this, we (like affirmative postmodernists, such as Derrida and Lyotard) should actively resist a subjectivist or relativist position to ethical decision-making.

The charge of relativism only works if one assumes that such an all-embracing, categorically-binding principle *should* exist. In other words, the term 'relativism' only makes sense when contrasted with 'absolutism' or 'universalism'. *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* distinguishes between relativism and absolutism as follows: everything stands in relation to other things (is relative to other things), except the absolute (which stands in no relation to anything) (Mautner, 2005: 529). The fear of relativism is, therefore, something that has always haunted absolutist transcendental or universal projects, and something that such projects always thought that they could overcome. Bauman (1993: 42) explains as follows:

> However difficult the practicing of moral universality proved to be, no practical difficulty was allowed to cast doubt on universality as an ideal and horizon of history. Relativism was always merely 'current'; its persistence in spite of present efforts tended to be played down as merely a momentary hitch in an otherwise unstoppable movement toward the ideal [namely, '[t]he dream of universality as the *ultimate destination of human kind*'].

In business ethics we see that the attitude expressed in the above citation is often adopted by the architects of moral codes, who view codes as the way to improve upon human conduct. What such

[34] See 'Virtue ethics' in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Available online at: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/ First published on July 18, 2003; revised on July 18, 2007.

architects strive for is non-ambivalent, non-aporetic codes which surely await us 'round the next corner. Or the corner after [the] next' (9). However, if we forgo this dream of universality, or the idea that the perfect code awaits us around the next corner, then the charge of relativism also loses its sting. This is, in effect, a very liberating move, since the modernist project has always been accompanied by radical doubt, which follows it like a shadow that threatens to subsume the light of the ideal, and expose the project in all its brittleness.

But, where does this leave us? As argued during the course of this chapter, to say that all ethical positions are relative to other ethical positions need not mean that all ethical positions are equally valued. Paul Cilliers (2005: 260; 263), who is also a supporter of affirmative postmodernism, states that '[l]imited knowledge is not "any" knowledge… We can make strong claims, but since these claims are limited, we have to be modest about them.' To make a strong claim means that we must actively resist vagueness in our practices and thought processes. Our statements and our positions must be intelligible, even though they account only for a limited perspective. There can be no excuses for 'ethical' sloppiness that leads to bad decisions and actions (262-263).

6.1.1. The ethical task: learning to reflect on, and engage with, ethical problems

If all ethical positions are not equally valid, then it is important for the moral agent to learn how to *engage* in moral thinking and decision-making. Although introductions to normative ethical theories have an important pedagogical value, the moral agent should not be seduced into thinking that 'ethical problems can be solved in a quasi-technical way through the application of certain procedures or through the application of formal models of reasoning' (Verstraeten, 2000: 3). Normative theories must become *tools* for ethical argumentation and decision-making, not blueprints that can dictate to us how we should act. This implies that apart from considering moral problems from the perspective of these theories, the moral agent must also 'clarify what the problem means, what meanings are connected with the problem, and how the problem fits into the wider social context', before ethically reflecting on the solution to a moral problem (van Tongeren in Verstraeten, 2000: viii).

In organisational terms this means that one should focus on how ethics is formed and contested in practice, the discourse in which ethics is enacted, and the manner in which ethical subjectivity is formed within organisations (Clegg et al., 2007: 107). One of the most important goals of business ethics should be to teach students how to reflect upon moral problems. Business ethics has an undeniable practical component, and to forget this is to engage in fundamental ethics which is

concerned 'with the rational *foundation* of norms' (Verstraeten, 2000: 5). Reflecting on ethical problems, therefore, cannot be divorced from the complexities of real-life management practices; and, theoretical and conceptual frameworks should be employed that take account of the ways in which ethics is 'differentially embedded in practices that operate in an active and contextualized manner' (Clegg et al., 2007: 108; 111). On this count, moral codes and models cannot *determine* ethical practice. Rather (to reiterate the point), '[t]hey become instruments that skilful and knowledgeable [organisational] members can engage and play with freely in their everyday management of their own and others' affairs' (112).

This argument is, therefore, not against ethical rules. Contrary to the dichotomy that Bauman (1993) sets up between the irrational moral impulse and rational rules, a more fruitful approach is to view rational rules as being in service of ethical decision-making. To this end, ten Bos (1997: 1001) argues that 'ethical rules can do much more with people than just desensitize or stupefy them.' To make the point more clearly, ten Bos (1012) refers to Foucault's (1982: 33) distinction between *l'agent moral* (who follows the ethical code to the letter) and *le sujet moral* (who consciously chooses a certain attitude with regard to the code)[35]. Business ethics, as a technology, creates moral agents; whereas the view on business ethics supported in this study, is one that promotes the development of moral subjects, who use rules and instruments to 'legitimize and to negotiate organizational realities' (Clegg et al., 2007: 113).

6.2. Tenet 2: Ethics implies choice and performative reflexivity

A subtle implication that emerges from this discussion is that, since ethical theories cannot provide us with all the answers, we are also bound to run up against the limits of rationality and procedural argumentation. If we endow too much faith in logical argumentation, we risk reducing ethics to a 'happy positivism' (Culler, 1983). We should, therefore, acknowledge the inherent limitations and exclusions that characterise our ethical models, as well as the complexity with which we have to grapple in making ethical decisions.

Moral judgement cannot merely be a question of reasoning: choosing a certain interpretation of the good life, and deciding on a hierarchy of values is as much a matter of personal conviction and individual moral judgement as it is of reason (Verstraeten, 2000:4). Therefore, it is impossible to speak of ethics without also speaking of personal *choice*. If there is no pure, universal description of

[35] In this study, the terms '(moral) agent' and '(moral) subject' are used interchangeably. However, the terms are employed in the spirit of Foucault's description of the moral subject as someone who consciously chooses a certain attitude with regard to the code.

how we should act or be, then we inevitably *have* to choose (to abstain from choosing is also a choice) (Cilliers, de Villiers & Roodt, 2002:16). This is not a comfortable situation. As Bauman (in Bauman & Tester, 2001: 46) states: 'being moral means being bound to make choices under conditions of acute and painful uncertainty'. Being uncertain not only means that we do not know what the best possible course of action is, but also implies that we must acknowledge and grapple with the *aporia* and *impasse* that we encounter the moment our arguments run up against the limits of logic. Often it is exactly these moments that reveal the deepest insights into the nature of ethics, and being as such.

Such encounters, however, also open up this characterisation of ethics to the charge of the performative contradiction. Such a contradiction occurs when we assert the limits of reason at the locutionary level, whilst still conducting our arguments in the language of reason at the performative level (Fleming, 1996: 169). As stated earlier, this radical critique of reason is vehemently opposed by Habermas (1987), who argues that such a critique results in the decentering of the subject and the desublimation of our conception of reason. Nevertheless, as Cilliers (2005:261) reminds us, if we acknowledge that things are complex, then we must also acknowledge the fact that 'some form of performative tension is inevitable'. Cilliers (261) continues by stating that:

> We are playing in what Wood (1990:150) calls the "theatre of difficulty", and this requires a certain "performative reflexivity" (132). We need to demonstrate the difficulties we are in, also in the way we talk about them. Our discourse should reflect the complexities. To talk about the complex world as if it can be understood clearly is a contradiction of another kind, and this is a contradiction with ethical implications... It is only by acknowledging that we are in trouble that we can start grappling with the complexities around us... In Derrida's (2000:467) words: 'There is ethics precisely where I am in a performative powerlessness.'

This complex, postmodern characterisation of ethics denotes a modest position. However, as Cilliers states (2005: 261), '[the] modest position is not weak, it is responsible.' The modest position – which emphasises both choice and a measure of performative reflexivity – does not, however, imply that we shouldn't do the necessary calculation and groundwork that precedes any responsible judgement or decision. Rather, the point is that such calculations cannot absolve us from making decisions. In this regard, Derrida (1988a: 116) writes that an ethical 'decision can only come into being in the space that exceeds the calculable program that would destroy all responsibility by transforming it into a programmable effect of determinate causes.' Bennington

(2000: 15) spells out this insight in terms of ethics: 'Ethics' he writes 'begins where the case does not correspond to any rule, and where the decision has to be taken without subsumption.'

6.2.1. The ethical task: broadening perspectives on available choices

If, as Clegg et al. (2007: 111) rightly maintain, choice does not involve complete free play, but 'proposes an oscillation between possibilities, where these possibilities are determined situationally', then business ethicists should help students and practitioners to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the different choices and decisions that are open to them in any given situation. In order to facilitate this process of reflection, business ethicists should also provide students and practitioners with the means of 'breaking out of their closed or limited hermeneutic circles' (Verstraeten, 2000: ix). Although this will not dispel the anxiety that characterises ethical decision-making, it may help to broaden the perspectives of students and practitioners alike, thereby teaching them 'to attend to [the] gestures of exclusion' (Ryan, 1982: 3) that accompanies any decision, and to gain more robust and diverse perspectives on situations.

In order to illustrate this point, consider the following example by Munro (1998: 206): 'much of the workings of society' he states 'are *excluded* from the machinations of bookkeeping'. He quotes Cooper (1988: 183) in this regard: 'Clean air, trust, social harmony, community health and safety do not have market prices. Without a price their worth tends to be devalued'. By exposing students and business practitioners to literary and philosophical texts that offer a horison of interpretation which is different to the scientific or positivist paradigm in which they have been trained (Verstraeten, 2000: ix-x), business ethicists can help students and practitioners to consider more factors and make 'better' calculations before undertaking decisions[36]. In this regard, Verstraeten (x) recalls the words of Marcel Proust: the *true voyage of discovery is not to seek out new territory, but to learn to see with new eyes.*

[36] In terms of developing business ethics pedagogy, the book *Business Ethics: Broadening the Perspective* (edited by Verstraeten (2000) and initiated by the *European Ethics Network*) addresses the issue of teaching business ethics and attempts to heighten the applicability of business ethics courses by framing business ethics as an 'integral life-enabling education' (vii). The argument here is that:

> actual and future professionals are not sufficiently prepared to deal with the ethical aspects of their professional decisions and with the social consequences of their work. They need a broader education in which their professional knowledge and expertise is completed with the ability to resolve ethical dilemmas and with the capacity to discern the values that are at stake in every professional decision (viii).

Such an education would be comprised of 'a broadly literary, philosophical, and cultural education that provides future professionals with the capacity to 'meaning-fully' interpret the reality within which they live and act' (x).

6.3. Tenet 3: Ethics is a contextually-defined practice

Although the possibility of ethical action rests with the individual moral agent as ethical decision-maker, it is impossible to consider the questions 'what ought I to do?' and 'what type of person should I be?' without accounting for the particular context in which the moral agent is embedded. To recall: this point is specifically emphasised by the later Parker (1998b) who argues that we must go beyond the metaphysics of good and evil, in the interest of providing a thicker description of the specific contexts in which ethical decisions and actions are undertaken. In this regard, Painter-Morland (2008: 87) describes the moral task as follows:

> Moral agents are required to remain fully engaged with the concrete contingencies and dynamics of the world. Instead of an abstract cognitive exercise, ethics as practice is all about participation, relationships and responsiveness.

Our ethical responses and the type of people we become are inseparable in a world where the descriptions that we attribute to ourselves and our actions are never neutral. In the absence of a grand universal scheme, *all* our decisions and actions take on political and ethical significance (Cilliers et al., 2002: 11). This is because we act, and are acted, upon by each other; and are, therefore, constituted through practice and through engagement with the world. This process of identity formation also helps to shape our conceptions of what it means to be human, how we should relate with the world, and even what the world is (Cilliers & de Villiers, 2000:238). Therefore, contrary to the modernist project, which presents the self as a fixed and coherent individual (accessible to both herself and others), we see that knowledge about the self is limited, contextual, and temporal. On this understanding, ethics is 'one of the many practices in which individuals engage in order to constitute themselves into subjects' (Keleman & Peltonen, 2001: 162).

This point reaffirms the insight that the normative dimension of business is inseparable from the more instrumental or descriptive dimensions (see sec. 3; chap. 3, sec. 6.1); and, that our actions are not determined by *a priori* schemes, but by contextually-based frames of meaning. Dillon (2000: 2) sums up this view as follows:

> Human existence [is] understood as always already ethical... [where ethics should not be understood] by reference to a command issued by some superior being or moral law. [Ethics should be understood] instead, in terms of the ethos or way of being of things derived from

> their location within an inescapable matrix of relationality that is both diachronic as well as synchronic, temporal as well as spatial.

Let us turn to the example of affirmative action programmes in order to illustrate the above point: despite the active propagation of equal employment opportunity (EEO) legislation in America, it has not been sufficient to gain equal status for women in organisations. Drawing from the literature on affirmative action (by Martin (2000), Meyerson and Kolb (2001), and Thorne and Saunders (2002)), Clegg et al. (2007: 112) argue that the reason for this is because the legislation does not reach 'the tacit micropractices of everyday organizational life' through which discrimination is enacted. Here we see, how organisational stereotypes and prejudices cannot be eradicated completely through legislation, but are – to a large extent – the product of the power and agency of those organisational members who interact to create gender inequality. This example serves to make both the point that ethics is culturally-driven and enacted within a specific context (112), and that ethics is not defined by *a priori* schemes, but concerns processes of self-formation amongst organisational members (115). As such, ethics always comes with a history; we are embedded (or 'emplaced' (Munro (1998)) within certain circumstances that serve to structure our ethical paradigms.

6.3.1. The ethical task: nurturing a critical disposition

Given the above situation, business ethicists should train students and professionals to exercise vigilance, and to reflect upon the specific values to which they attach importance, and which inform their frames of meaning. Reflecting on one's values and frames of meaning also necessitates consideration of the tradition to which one belongs, since as both Willmott (1998) and Verstraeten (2000) reminds us, there is no vantage point from which we can act in a neutral or disinterested fashion:

> Like it or not, one always belongs to a tradition of thought or belief or, in a fragmented culture, to various traditions from which one draws inspiration. Even when one tries *a priori* to put the influence of tradition out of play, one belongs to a tradition, namely the tradition that uses this conception (Verstraeten, 2000: xi).

Unlike a depolitcised communitarian response to tradition, business ethicists should help students and practitioners to provide 'a *critical* account of how we came to believe what we do about ourselves and the world' (Painter-Morland, 2008: 90; my italics) when we reflect on our frames of

meaning. Such frames of meaning cannot be justified on the basis of epistemological or ontological arguments. We must, rather offer ethical-political reasons for why we judge our ethical schemes and values to be important, whilst simultaneously accepting the exclusions, limitations, and provisionality of such schemes.

6.4. Ethics as practice: Implications

Ethics as practice, involves the continuous task of 'removing the conceptual and procedural restraints with which we have tried to secure morality' and thereby 'allow ourselves to be challenged by the various contextual and relational realities that fill our everyday lives' (Painter-Morland, 2008: 93). In unpacking this last citation, it becomes clear that affirmative postmodernism can help us to address the procedural, substantive and individual-vs.-communal concerns that were raised in chapter one in relation to the standard normative tale of business ethics.

When business ethics becomes a practice, self-aware moral subjects have to account for their conceptions of the good (along with the traditions that support such conceptions), as well as how their morals are enacted in practice. On this account, substantive concerns can never be done away with as – contrary to the modernist conception – we are not autonomous individuals making our own rational and optimal choices. In this regard, Bauman (in Bauman & Tester, 2001: 46) writes: 'being moral means knowing that things may be good or bad. But it does not mean knowing, let alone knowing for sure, which things are good and which things are bad.' We have to thus be continuously aware of how our actions both form us, and affect others. Note, however, that this stance is not the same as the version of self-surveillance propagated by Kant (where we must avoid despising or condemning ourselves *secretly in our own eyes* (Kant, 2008: 75)). We can never have knowledge of the correct decision ahead of the fact (Munro, 1998: 208). Morality is not abstract, but grounded in the everyday problems of real people living their lives. As such, our decisions are not undertaken in a state of free play, but are limited by the structures, power relations, and networks in which we partake (see chap. 3, secs 5.2. & 6.2.).

Ethics, therefore, requires both self-awareness and an awareness of the communities in which we live and work. We need to be able to deal simultaneously with the individual and the communal, the personal and the structural. We need to be able to affirm the 'strange in the self', instead of turning away and saying 'this is not me' (Keleman & Peltonen, 2001: 163). And, lastly, we need to focus on relationships and not attributes, and employ performative definitions where our understanding of things depends on their use (Czarniawska, 2001: 256).

7. Conclusion

This chapter commenced with an analytic and substantive circumscription of the postmodern paradigm, which presents us with an alternative to the standard normative tale – one that resonates better with the nature of our experiences, ethical and otherwise. An important implication of postmodernism concerns the challenge that this position poses for the distinction between the normative and the descriptive views of business ethics. It was shown that such a distinction is conceptually untenable, as it relies on problematic modernist assumptions concerning the nature of humans and of the world. However, despite its challenge to modernist ideas, the postmodern paradigm is not unanimously well-received in the business ethics world. The merits of importing postmodern thought to business ethics was, therefore, evaluated at the hand of a number of studies undertaken by business ethicists and organisational theorists. This discussion was followed by a few conceptual clarifications and critical remarks concerning the analysis presented in this chapter. The chapter concluded with a summary of the main tenets of a postmodernism ethics identified during the course of the chapter. These tenets focus on the provisional nature of ethical knowledge, the importance of choice in making ethical decision-making, and the embeddedness of ethical practices. For each of these features, the ethical task was outlined, and the implications for this view of ethics as practice were spelt out.

The insights to emerge from this last section are compatible with many of the specific claims made in deconstruction, as well as with a number of critical complexity insights. This last section can, therefore, be read as an introduction to both a deconstructive ethics and a complex ethics. Earlier it was mentioned that Derrida's deconstructive theory will be explained and applied in chapter four and five. However, before moving on to a more detailed discussion of Derrida's position, it is first necessary to develop our understanding of a complex ethics (of which a deconstructive ethics serves as an example). To this end, chapter three presents an overview of the paradigm of complexity. Specifically, it will be shown that critical complexity theory is a position that is sensitive to the normative implications of our systems of meaning and ways of being in the world. The discussion on complexity (particularly critical complexity), therefore, strengthens and helps to explain the view of ethics, which is being developed in this study. In other words, the complexity vocabulary supplements the philosophical position supported in this study, and may lead to additional insights regarding our understanding and practice of business ethics.

Part II:

Complexity Theory and Deconstruction: Rethinking the Normative Basis of Business Ethics

Chapter 3:
The Paradigm of Complexity

1. Introduction

The French complexity theorist, Edgar Morin (2008: 19) argues that, in popular parlance, complexity has traditionally been understood as a term which 'always carried with it a warning to our understanding, a cautioning against clarification, simplification, and overly rapid reduction.' In a certain sense, this understanding of complexity represents both the starting point and the end point of the analysis given in this chapter. However, much ground needs to be covered before complexity can be adequately understood – both as a paradigm, and as a position that can hold important consequences for our understanding of ethics.

Stengers (1997: 43) writes that 'the theme of complexity has played an ambiguous role in discourses on science'. 'Moreover' Dillon (2000: 4) notes that 'its genealogy, while different from, is in many ways as diverse as that of poststructuralism'. This chapter proceeds with an introduction to some of the positions that have contributed to the development of the paradigm of complexity. These developments do not allow for clear chronological distinctions. However, in broad terms, one can state that interest in the theory of complexity developed in the first-half of the twentieth century. During this time, many scientists concerned themselves with problems of complexity in micro and macro-physics, as opposed to problems of simplicity (Rasch, 1991: 65). As noted by Dillon, the theory of complexity did not emerge from a single discipline, but from the interplay of several disciplines, including physics, mathematics, biology, economy, engineering, and computer science (Chu, Strand & Fjelland, 2003: 19). Although space does not allow for a full analysis of the complexity developments in all of these fields, the focus of the first half of this chapter will be on three significant movements, namely cybernetics, *restricted* complexity (explained below), and general systems theory[37].

The decision to focus on these three movements is grounded on the impact that these movements have had on *critical* complexity theory. Generally-speaking, two dominant views of complexity theory can be identified. The first view is the scientific view, in which the laws and rules of complexity are explored. Within this paradigm, it is believed that complex reality is guided by simple rules, which can, in principle, be discovered. Morin (2007: 10) refers to this scientific view

[37] Attention will also be given to the recent complexity-related developments in fields such as organisation studies, leadership studies, and business ethics.

as restricted complexity, because complexity is attached as a kind of wagon behind the truth locomotive, and, therefore, still remains within the epistemology of the classical sciences. In this regard, restricted complexity resonates well with the realist view of post-modernism (with a hyphen), systemic modernism, and critical modernism – all of which are movements that support the notion that, although the world is complicated, it is inherently 'solvable' (see chap. 2, sec. 5.1.).

Over-and-against this understanding of complexity, one has a more philosophical understanding of complexity, which Morin (10) refers to as generalised complexity. Within this paradigm, the notion of complexity *itself* is taken seriously, which necessitates that we undertake an epistemological, cognitive, and paradigmatic shift, which bears on the whole organisation of knowledge (10). Therefore, just as postmodern ideas present a challenge to the universal knowledge claims of modernism; this notion of complexity presents a challenge to the way in which we view science and the world. It is this latter understanding of complexity which will be denoted by the term critical complexity within the context of this study.

The term critical complexity was coined by Cilliers (2010a). Although it encompasses Morin's (2007) understanding of generalised complexity, the emphasis is on a self-critical rationality, which Cilliers (2010a: 14) defines as 'a rationality that makes no claim for objectivity, or for any special status for the grounds from which the claim is made'. A self-critical rationality is, therefore, the *outcome* of acknowledging the irreducible nature of complexity (2). The implications that a critical position holds, especially for our understanding of ethic, will be further explored at the end of the chapter. However, before extrapolating on these implications, it is important to gain a better understanding of what critical complexity entails.

The second half of the chapter, therefore, presents an introduction to critical complexity (at the hand of similarities and differences to cybernetics, restricted complexity, and general systems theory). This is followed by a circumscription of the features that characterise the paradigm of critical complexity. Once it is clear what critical complexity theory is, the implications of the critical position are spelt out. These implications provide the context for understanding Derrida's deconstructive theory, which is introduced in the following chapter.

Before proceeding with the discussion, it must be stressed that this chapter constitutes a theoretical analysis. The practical implications to emerge from the paradigm of (critical) complexity will become clear in subsequent chapters (specifically chapters five, six, and seven).

2. The origins of critical complexity theory

2.1. Cybernetics

One of the earliest movements to have impacted significantly on the development of complexity theory is cybernetics. Of specific significance is the influence that cybernetics has had on our understanding of how complex systems function. In order to provide a chronology of ideas, the following discussion treats cybernetics in terms of three phases, namely: first-order, second-order, and third-order cybernetics.

2.1.1. First-order cybernetics and information theory

According to Lafontaine (2007: 28), the field of cybernetics 'took root at the core of the techno-scientific project implemented by the American government during the Second World War', and served as the precursor of Robotics and Computer Information Ethics. Norbert Wiener, a prominent mathematician, originally coined the term 'cybernetics' (which is derived from the Greek word *kybernētēs*, which means steersman, governor, pilot, or rudder), and is generally considered to be the founding father of cybernetics. However, many influential academics were involved in the establishment of cybernetics as a field, including the mathematicians, John von Neumann and Warren Weaver; the engineer, Claude Shannon; the physicist, Heinz von Foerster; and the cultural anthropologists Margaret Mead and (her third husband) Gregory Bateson.

Lafontaine (30) argues that – despite the interdisciplinary nature of the field – cybernetics is based on three major principles (namely entropy, information, and feedback) and that these principles lay the foundation for a new science. Lafontaine (30) further argues that, although important advances in cybernetics were made during the wartime years, it was only at the end of the war that some of the above-mentioned acclaimed thinkers met to discuss questions of control and feedback. The forum for the discussion was the Macy Conferences on Cybernetics, which were held between 1946 and 1953 (Hayles, 1994: 441).

The first Macy Conference, which was led by von Neumann and Wiener, marked the triumph of 'information over materiality' in demonstrating that 'the important entity in the man-machine equation was information, not energy' (Hayles, 1999: 51). Apart from arguing for the construction of information as a theoretical entity, Katherine Hayles (50) maintains that members of the Macy Conference also deployed arguments concerning: the construction of (human) neural structures as

flows of information, and the construction of artifacts in a manner that translated information flows into observable operations.

Morin (2008: 13) explains that information emerged with Hartley, and especially Shannon and Weaver, as communicational on the one hand, and statistical on the other. Whereas the former view is concerned with the transmission of messages and integrated into a theory of communication, the latter view deals with the probability of an elementary unit of information appearing. The concept of entropy – which refers to the level of disorder in a system (Horgan, 1995: 107) – gained significance at the beginning of the 20th century, with the formulation of the second law of thermodynamics, which states that the universe tends towards general entropy or maximal disorder (Morin, 2008: 40). The link between the Shannonian equation of information and entropy lies in the discovery that entropy is inversely proportional to information. Or, otherwise stated, 'there is equivalence between information and negative entropy or negenentropy' (14). Not only is this theory relevant to the communication of messages on a computer (for example), but information theory could also be extrapolated to the biological realm, where, for example, genetic mutation is likened to noise or 'entropy' that disrupts the reproduction of a message (information), thereby provoking an 'error' (with respect to the original message) in the constitution of a new message. The novel element is, therefore, that information theory 'could, on the one hand, be integrated into the notion of biological organization… [and], on the other hand, somewhat surprisingly link thermodynamics, or physics, to biology' (13).

This new science, therefore, also marks an epistemological revolution in that the intrinsic study of beings and objects is rejected in favour of an approach that focuses on 'interactions between objects, regardless of their nature (physical, biological, artificial or human)' (Lafontaine, 2007: 29). In this sense, cybernetics poses a challenge to the distinction between human and machine, since the behaviour of both thermostats and people, for example, can be explained 'through theories of feedback, hierarchical structure, and control' (Hayles, 1999: 84; see Haraway, 1985).

The brief description provided above serves to introduce the premises of first-order cybernetics, which dates from 1945 to 1960 (Hayles, 1994: 441). Although cybernetics presents a radical epistemological break in science, one element of the old paradigm still remains, namely the idea of scientific objectivity. During the conference, however, the question of reflexivity arose – and although some of the physicists steered the debate to more comfortable grounds – a group of thinkers (led by Heinz von Foerster) continued to think about the problem of reflexivity after the

conference (Hayles, 1999: 10). The central issue that preoccupied this group was 'how to redefine homeostatic systems so that the observer can be taken into account' (10).

The foundational stage of cybernetics is, therefore, characterised by the emergence of two constellations, which were in competition with each other, namely a conservative constellation, which privileged 'constancy over change, predictability over complexity, [and] equilibrium over evolution' (Hayles, 1994: 446); and a constellation which privileged 'change over constancy, evolution over equilibrium, [and] complexity over predictability' (446). Whereas, the conservative constellation focused on the concept of homeostasis, defined as 'the ability of an organism to maintain itself in a stable state' (446), the central concept that interested researchers from the second constellation was reflexivity, which Hayles (446) defines as 'turning a system's rules back on itself so as to cause it to engage in more complex behavior.'

2.1.2. Second-order cybernetics and autopoiesis

Thus, during the 1960s second-order cybernetics developed in an attempt to account for the observers of systems, who themselves are also systems. The initiative was driven by von Foerster, who experimented with various ways in which to formulate reflexivity[38]. Von Foerster (in von Foerster & Poerksen, 2002: 110) describes the difference between first and second-order cybernetics as follows:

> First order cybernetics separates the subject from the object and refers to an assumed world "out there". Second order cybernetics or cybernetics of cybernetics is itself circular. You learn to understand yourself as a part of the world that you wish to observe. The entire observational situation ends up in another area in which you suddenly have to take responsibility for your observations.

One of the biggest problems with which von Foerster grappled was finding a way of speaking about reflexivity without sliding into a solipsistic position. Of this problem, Hayles (1999: 133-134) writes: 'The message from the Macy Conferences was clear: if reflexivity was to be credible, it had to be insulated against subjectivity and presented in a context which had at least the potential for rigorous (preferably mathematical) formulation.'

[38] In this regard, see von Foerster's (1984) influential book, entitled *Observing Systems.*

According to Hayles (134), a breakthrough occurred in 1969, when the Chilean biologist, Humberto Maturana, unveiled his ideas of treating cognition as a biological phenomenon at a conference to which von Foerster had invited him. This idea was presented in the seminal paper, entitled 'What the frog's eye tells the frog's brain', in which Maturana and his co-authors demonstrated 'that the [frog's] eye speaks to the brain in a language already highly organized and interpreted instead of transmitting some more or less accurate copy of the distribution of light upon the receptors' (Lettvin, Maturana, McCulloch & Pitts, 1959: 1950). In other words, instead of registering reality, the frog's perceptual system constructs reality (Hayles, 1999:135). According to Hayles (1994: 461), this article – which discredits the idea of a transcendental position from which to observe reality – served to blow 'a frog-sized hole in objectivist epistemology.' Maturana makes similar observations in his work on colour vision, in which he demonstrates that there is no direct correlation between an animal's colour perception and the world. Rather, a correlation exists between the activity in an animal's retina and its experience of colour (135; see Maturana, Uribe & Frenk, 1968). Both his work on the frog's perceptual system and colour vision, led Maturana to conclude that there can be no unmediated understanding of reality. Rather, as Hayles (1999:136) states: '[reality] comes into existence for us, and all living creatures, *only through the interactive processes determined solely by the organism's own organization.*'

Hayles (10) argues that second order cybernetics reached its mature stage with the publication of Humberto Maturana and his co-author, Francisco Varela's (another Chilean biologist's), book entitled, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: the Realization of Living*. Their main premise is that all systems are autonomous, self-referential, and organisationally-closed. In other words, 'living systems operate within the boundaries of an organization that closes in on itself and leaves the world on the outside' (136). This means that systems are only open to the environment from an observer's perspective. Therefore, '[e]verything said is said by an observer' (Maturana & Varela, 1980: xxii). This, however, does not mean that organisationally-closed systems are isolated systems. The point is rather that the 'environment' is drawn into the system, in order to facilitate is own production and maintenance (Morgan, 2006: 244). Poli (2009: 8) explains the consequence of this view as follows: 'the system's connection with the environment is no longer a kind of immediate and direct relation between the system and its environment but becomes a reflexive relation, mediated by the self-referential loops that constitute the system itself.' Self-reference is thus the key to understanding organisationally-closed systems. To illustrate this point, consider Maturana and Varela's (1980: xv) treatment of the nervous system as an activity 'determined by the nervous system itself and not by the external world'. The external world is only accorded 'a triggering role' in releasing 'the internally-determined activity of the nervous system.'

Maturana and Varela (1980) further maintain that, because systems are organisationally-closed, their ability to self-create or self-renew is due to the system's capacity for self-production through feedback loops – a process which they call autopoiesis. In *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, Maturana explains the origins of the word autopoiesis: he and Varela initially used the term 'circular organisation' to refer to the system's capacity for self-production through feedback loops, but found this term to be inadequate, since it did not 'convey the central feature of the organization of the living, which is autonomy' (xvii). The term 'poiesis' followed after a conversation with a friend regarding 'Don Quixote's dilemma of whether to follow the path of arms (*praxis*, action) or the path of letters (*poiesis*, creation and production)'. It was after this conversation, that Maturana claims to have understood 'for the first time the power of the word 'poiesis' and thus 'invented the word that [they] needed: *autopoiesis*' (xvii). A few pages on, Maturana and Varela (9) provide the following description of autopoiesis:

> It is the circularity of its organization that makes a living system a unit of interactions, and it is the circularity that it must maintain in order to remain a living system and to retain its identity through different interactions.

What differentiates the reflexivity in autopoietic systems from the understanding accorded to reflexivity in the Macy Conferences is the fact that reflexivity is no longer associated with 'psychological complexity', but is rather 'constituted through the interplay between a system and its components… [which] mutually define each other in the bootstrap operation characteristic of reflexive self-constitution' (Hayles, 1994: 462).

In the early 1980s, the sociologist Niklas Luhmann, appropriated and generalised Maturana and Varela's notion of autopoiesis to describe the autonomous and self-referential operations of social systems, which he elucidated in his book, entitled *Social Systems* (1995) (Rasch & Knodt, 1994: 3). Luhmann was one of Habermas's most prominent critics, opposing his view of universal principles in favour of principles that are self-referential, and, therefore, paradoxically based on themselves (Arnoldi, 2001: 2). Poli (2009: 9-11) explains Luhmann's application of the theory of autopoiesis to social systems as follows: for social systems to be seen as self-referential systems, it is important to acknowledge a degree of systemic stability. Luhmann follows Parsons (1951) in viewing the reproduction of social systems as provided by the reproduction of its (social) roles (i.e. patterns of action typical of a specific system) (Poli, 2009: 9). Luhmann, however, goes further than Parsons in providing a firmer basis for social roles in terms of meaning: 'the reproduction of a social system is

grounded on the reproduction of meaning, e.g. through education and other socializing functions' (9).

Citing Luhmann (1986: 174), Poli (2009: 10) further explains that the units of meaning used by a social system for its reproduction are communications, which Luhmann (building on Bühler, 1934) views as consisting of information, utterances, and understanding. This latter component of communication 'refers to what the *receiver* grasps from the previous two aspects of a communication' (10). Since all three components are necessary to form a communication, communication can never be attributed to a single individual (due to the role of the receiver). As such, Luhmann defines communications as the basis for social acts (10).

Using this theory, Luhmann distinguishes modern social systems into different *functional systems*, depending on the domains of practice e.g. law, economy, science, art etc. Each of these subsystems is further evaluated in terms of relevant and irrelevant communication, (which is a distinction valid to all subsystems), as well as a function-specific distinction. This function specific distinction is unique to the given domain e.g. the distinction of legal or illegal communication applies to the legal system, whereas the distinction between true and untrue propositions/theories applies to the scientific system. Luhmann also draws distinctions between social systems based on specific *subtypes* (such as interaction or organisation). These subtypes are based on types of communication, for example face-to-face communication is applicable to interpersonal interactions, whereas decisions are applicable for organisations (10).

What is of note for this discussion is that '[a]ll the communication takes place within the system; there is no communicative exchange between the system and its environment' (11). Although not thermodynamically closed, social systems are informationally-closed. However, systems are able to reproduce the system/environment distinction (wherein the environment perturbs the system and triggers internal processes) within the system itself. This ability of the system 'to apply to itself the distinction between the system and its environment requires that the system be capable of observing itself' (11). Poli (11) claims that it is this 'observational re-entry' that both 'generates the structure of the system [and] constitutes the second level (or cycle) of autopoietic reproduction'[39].

[39] For Luhmann, the complexity generated by these self-referential processes cannot be resolved, and in this sense, his perspective coincides with the perspectives of those who support the agenda of critical complexity. However, what distinguishes Luhmann from these critical complexity theorists is his emphasis on operationally-closed systems, which gives his work a constructionist dimension.

The theory of autopoiesis not only had a profound impact on Luhmann's understanding of social systems, but also radically altered the cybernetics paradigm (Hayles, 1999:10). More specifically, it brought about two major shifts: namely, a shift from observed systems to the observer of systems; and a shift from message, signal, and information as that which circulates through systems to the mutually constitutive interactions between the components of a system (11). As such, Hayles (158) accredits Maturana and Varela with introducing important insights regarding reflexivity and the role of the observer (along with the implications that this holds for the notion of scientific objectivity), and for drawing attention to the specificity and concreteness of embodied processes. However, Hayles (158-159) is critical of the idea of organisationally-closed systems, and remains unconvinced that Maturana and Varela are able to solve the problem of solipsism. Although Hayles (158) concedes that Maturana and Varela's (1987: 242) statement that: 'We do not see what we do not see, and what we do not see does not exist' cannot be properly understood without contextualising it in terms of the observer's sensory perceptions, she, nevertheless questions the consequences that the notion of operational closure holds for our understanding of reality. In this regard, consider the following citation (Hayles, 1999: 158):

> But what if "the observer" ceases to be constructed as a generic marker and becomes invested with a specific psychology, including highly idiosyncratic and possibly psychotic tendencies? Will the domains of self-conscious observers fail to stabilize external reality? Will the uncertainties then go beyond questions of epistemology and become questions of ontology? Will the observation that "what we do not see does not exist" sink deep into the structure of reality, undermining not only our ability to know but the ability of the world to be?

Ultimately, therefore, the constructivist dimension of operationally-closed systems carries solipsistic and relativist implications that cannot easily be overcome.

2.1.3. Third-order cybernetics and artificial life

As stated in the previous section, Maturana and Varela understood autonomy to be the central feature of the organisation of the living, and it is precisely the concept of autonomy that led Varela to the field of artificial life. In the proceedings of the first European conference on artificial life, Varela and his co-author, Bourgine (1992: xi), write that '[a]utonomy in this context refers to [the living's] basic and fundamental capacity to *be,* to assert their existence and bring forth a world that is significant and pertinent without being predigested in advance.' What differentiates third-order

cybernetics from second-order cybernetics is the emphasis on the capacity to bring forth a world through self-organisation – a capacity which is referred to as emergence. Here again, we see a subtle shift in how the characteristic of self-organisation functions in the cybernetic theory: whereas in second order cybernetics, self-organisation is associated with homeostasis (or system's maintenance), in third-order cybernetics, self-organisation refers to a system's ability to 'evolve in unpredictable and often highly complex ways through emergent processes' (Hayles, 1994: 463).

Emergence is also the quality that distinguishes artificial intelligence (AI) from artificial life (AL). Hayles (1999: 239) succinctly explains as follows: 'Whereas AI dreamed of creating consciousness inside a machine, AL sees human consciousness, understood as an epiphenomenon, perching on top of the machinelike functions that distributed systems carry out.' One of the most famous examples of artificial life software in von Neuman's self-reproducing cellular automata. As early as 1949, John von Neumann was already observing a phenomenon for which he had no proper name, but which he later referred to as complexity (Rasch, 1991: 66). This complex phenomenon which von Neumann was observing was the ability of a simple structure to produce a structure more complex than itself through a process of emergence.

In terms of the cellular automata, one sees how extremely complex patterns emerge from initially undifferentiated cellular automata, which are presented as pixels on a computer screen. These automata function as finite state machines that follow simple rules such as 'on if two neighbours are on, otherwise off'. The automata's states are continuously updated as they move through successive generations. On a computer screen, these automata give the impression of being alive, which has led some researchers to view them as a model for life (Hayles, 1999: 240). In this regard, Christopher Langton (1995: xi) –who supports a view of 'strong a-life' – writes that not only will artificial life teach us much about reality, but it 'will ultimately reach beyond biology… [to] include culture and technology in an extended view of nature.'

Although von Neumann's work predates third-order cybernetics, it is definitely a forerunner to the simulated worlds of virtual reality and artificial life that have entered both professional and consumer markets today, and that has created the hope of transforming consciousness into a informational pattern, which can be downloaded into a computer (Moravec, 1988: 109-110). A prominent question which baffled von Neumann, and subsequent researchers, and which is still relevant today, is how high-level computations can emerge from the underlying structure of the cellular automata (Hayles, 1999: 241). To explain this phenomenon, von Neumann postulated a 'complexity barrier', which is the point past which systems experience not only quantitative, but

also qualitative changes (Rasch, 1991: 67). Von Neumann (1966: 80) offers the following description of the complexity barrier:

> There is thus this completely decisive property of complexity, that there exists a critical size below which the process of synthesis is degenerative, but above which the phenomenon of synthesis, if properly arranged, can become explosive, in other words, where synthesis of automata can proceed in such a manner that each automaton will produce other automata which are more complex and of higher potentialities than itself.

This idea of complexity barrier was further explored by Langton, Norman Packard, and Stuart Kaufmann. All three these theorists postulated that the requisite variety and creative tension needed for emergent behaviour exists in the boundary area between order and chaos (Horgan, 1995: 106). Horgan (106) reports that Langton and Packard noted in their experiments with cellular automata that 'a system's computational capacity… peaks in a narrow regime between highly periodic and chaotic behavior.' As a result, they coined the popular term 'the edge of chaos' (Langton, 1992), which is widely used in definitions of complex systems.

2.2. The Santa Fe Institute, chaos theory, and restricted complexity

Concepts such as feedback, hierarchical structure, control, reflexivity, boundaries, self-organisation, emergence, and artificial life have played a vital role not only in the development of the cybernetics paradigm, but also in contemporary formulations of complexity theory.

Although Hayles categorises the work of Langton, Packard, and Kauffman in the cybernetics paradigm, these three theorists are more commonly associated with their work on complexity at the Sante Fe Institute. Indeed, Kauffman and Langton were amongst the scientific pioneers of the Institute, which was founded in 1984, and which is dedicated to the study of complex systems. One of the ambitions of the Sante Fe Institute is to construct a unified theory of complex systems. John Holland (1993) explicitly articulates this goal, stating that despite appearances, a range of complex systems 'do share significant characteristics, so much so that we group them under a single classification at the Santa Fe Institute, calling them complex adaptive systems [CAS].' Holland (1993) continues by stating that CAS 'signals [the Institute's] intuition that there are general principles that govern all complex behavior, principles that point to ways of solving… [our]

problems.' Not much has changed since this formulation, as a quick glance at the Institute's website[40] reveals that the aim is still:

> to discover, comprehend, and communicate the common fundamental principles in complex physical, computational, biological, and social systems that underlie many of the most profound problems facing science and society today.

Despite this ambitious agenda, complexity theorists have encountered numerous problems, beginning with the term itself. In the words of Horgan (1995: 105): 'Complexologists have struggled to distinguish their field from a closely related pop-science movement, chaos.' The phenomenon of chaos is often described with reference to the butterfly effect, which encapsulates the idea that one butterfly could eventually have a far-reaching ripple effect on subsequent historic events (an idea first introduced by Ray Bradbury in a 1952 short story on time-travel, entitled *A Sound of Thunder*, but which was later popularised by one of the pioneer's of chaos theory, Edward Lorenz). Chaos theory is used to describe systems that display non-linear dynamics, bifurcation, a sensitivity to initial conditions, and other mathematically-defined behaviour (Horgan, 1995: 109). These characteristics constitute the general principles of chaos theory, but despite the initial excitement over this new theory, 'chaos turned out to refer to a restricted set of phenomena that evolve in predictably unpredictable ways' (105-106). This prompted another pioneer in the field, David Ruelle (in Horgan, 1995: 109), to state that 'in spite of frequent triumphant announcements of 'novel' breakthroughs, [chaos] has had a declining output of interesting discoveries.' Although chaos theory did not achieve the success envisioned, chaos theorists did achieve something that complexity theorists at the Santa Fe Institute long hoped for: a precise description of the systems under observation.

Complexity theorists, such as Holland, Casti, and Fontana and Ballati are of the opinion that a unified theory of complexity, also known as a Theory of Complexity (TOC) or a Theory of Everything (TOE), is necessary 'in order to make the science of complexity more coherent, general and precise' (Chu et al. 2003: 19). Indeed, Chu et al. (19) note that this 'search for universal and unifying theories is something of an ideal in most scientific disciplines.' Some of the more prominent attempts at formulating the principles of complexity include Langton's (1992) ideas on life at the edge of chaos (described in the previous section), Per Bak's (1997) work on self-organised criticality, and Kauffman's (1993) work on attractors, strange attractors, and autocatalysis. However, despite the substantial contributions that these theorists have made to the

[40] http://www.santafe.edu/

theoretical debate, and to work on the formalisation and modelling of complex systems, attempts at unifying theories have been repeatedly criticised.

Indeed, Jack Cowan (in Horgan, 1995: 104), one of the Institute's founders, notes that the major discovery to have emerged from the Santa Fe Institute is that 'it's very hard to do science on complex systems.' Chu et al. (2003: 20 -21) states that although there is no litmus test for determining what counts as a scientific theory or not, scientific theories must necessary conform to three aims, namely:

- Prediction of the future behavior of a system given a set of observational data about it (predictive component)
- Theoretical understanding and/or description of a system (explanatory component)
- Provision of guidelines and control mechanisms for the intervention and manipulation of systems (control component).

Additionally, Chu et al. (21) point to three extra features of a scientific theory, designed to simultaneously foster explanation, prediction, and facilitation of control. The first element concerns the language in which a TOC is formulated. A TOC is commonly defined in a mathematical language, as mathematical formulations lead to high precision and generalisability, and may facilitate prediction and control. The second element concerns the idea that natural systems can be understood by studying their components. In other words, the idea is that simple principles underlie complex phenomena, and that it is possible to express these principles in a TOC. The third element concerns universalibity: a TOC should be able to explain a wide range of different complex systems (although Chu et al. (21) note that one could expect a possible trade-off between universality and mathematical quantifiability).

The traditional scientific paradigm, however, does not hold up when it comes to complex phenomena. There is no 'magic criterion' (Landauer in Horgan, 1995: 105) by which to unravel the complexities of nature. Indeed, Horgan (1995: 107) states that the entire field of complexity and artificial life is based on the following seductive syllogism:

> [Premise 1:] There are simple sets of mathematical rules that when followed by a computer give rise to extremely complicated patterns.
> [Premise 2:] The world also contains many extremely complicated patterns.

Conclusion: Simple rules underlie many extremely complicated phenomena in the world. With the help of powerful computers scientists can root those rules out.

In their implicit acceptance of this syllogism, researchers at the Institute typically follow a restricted approach to complexity (Morin, 2007:10). As described in the introduction, within this paradigm, 'complexity' is used to describe systems that are empirically presented as a multiplicity of inter-related processes, which are retroactively associated with one another in order to establish the 'laws of complexity'. A restricted approach to complexity is, therefore, a purely descriptive approach in that one strives to grasp and explain the interplay of the elements of a system in terms of rules. In this sense, cyberneticians and restricted complexity theorists share the dream of discovering the rules of complexity, which will allow them to accurately model living systems and to apply 'biological insights to engineered computational systems'[41], thereby forever altering the relation between humans and intelligent machines (Hayles, 1994: 467).

2.3. General systems theory

Another approach that shares certain features and aspirations with cybernetics is general systems theory; however, Morin (2008: 9) argues that general systems theory has a much wider scope than cybernetics. Indeed, it is quasi-universal in a certain sense, since 'all known reality, from the molecule to the cell to an organism to a society, can be conceived of as systems.' The biologist, Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1972: 414), provides a good description of the commonalities between systems theory and cybernetics. He remarks that although general systems theory did not spring out of the war effort (as is the case with cybernetics), both movements, nevertheless, share an interest in the organisational and teleological behaviour of systems. Von Bertalanffy (413-414) also notes that, despite the fact that cyberneticians and systems theorists have different starting points (technology versus science (especially biology)) and use different basic models (feedback circuits versus dynamic systems of interaction), both approaches present a challenge to the mechanistic conception of the universe (413-414). In this sense, general systems theory shares the cybernetics agenda, which is defined by Frank, Hutchinson, Livingstone, McCulloch and Wiener (in von Bertalanffy, 1972: 414) as 'the search for new approaches, for new and more comprehensive concepts, and for methods capable of dealing with the large wholes of organisms and personalities'.

Von Bertalanffy (1972: 407), however, is also quick to remind us that the system's approach is not new to the history of ideas. One formulation of the basic system's problem, which still remains

[41] http://www.santafe.edu/research/topics-information-processing-computation.php

valid today, is Aristotle's statement that the whole is more than the sum of the parts. Other systems thinkers that von Bertalanffy (408) mentions are Dionysius (who introduced the term hierarchic order); Nicholas of Cusa (who introduced the notion of *coincidentia oppositorum*, which refers to the fight amongst components of a system that nevertheless form a unified whole); Leibniz (whose hierarchy of monads closely resembles modern systems), and Hegel and Marx (especially in terms of their work on dialectics). As such, von Bertalanffy notes that:

> the problems with which we are nowadays concerned under the term "system" were not "born yesterday" out of current questions of mathematics, science, and technology. Rather, they are a contemporary expression of perennial problems which have been recognized for centuries and discussed in the language available at the time (408).

Modern day system's theory developed from the recognition that the paradigm of classic science, wherein phenomena are studied in terms of isolable elements, was no longer adequate for explaining complex phenomena. One of the fields in which this problem became very pertinent was biology. Already in the 1920's, von Bertalanffy had identified the organisation of organisms as 'the fundamental character of the living thing' (410). This organisation[42] referred to the 'set of elements of a system standing in interrelation among themselves and with the environment' (417). Von Bertalanffy (412) further defined the relation between systems and their environment as open. This means that systems exchange matter with their environment, which, according to von Bertalanffy (412), is the hallmark of living systems.

Critical complexity theorists such as Morin (2008) and Cilliers (1998) support this understanding of 'open systems'. However, this understanding is at odds with Maturana and Varela's conception of openness and closure in autopoietic systems (an idea, which as stated earlier, is appropriated by Niklas Luhmann in his description of social systems). To recall: Maturana and Varela's theory of autopoiesis rejects the classical difference between open and closed systems (which is contingent on whether the system's boundary is porous enough to let the system and the environment exchange

[42] In order to capture this idea of organisation, von Bertalanffy coined the terms 'organismic biology' and 'the system theory of the organism' (von Berthalanffy, 1972: 410). This organismic programme was the germ for what later became known as general systems theory. Von Bertalanffy (411) states that he first formulated the notion of general systems theory orally in the 1930s, and then in various publications after the Second World War. This formulation reads as follows:

> General Systems Theory is a logico-mathematical field whose task is the formulation and derivation of those general principles that are applicable to "systems" in general. In this way, exact formulations of terms such as wholeness and sum, differentiation, progressive mechanization, centralization, hierarchical order, finality and equifinality, etc., become possible, terms which occur in all sciences dealing with "systems" and imply their logical homology (411).

matter) in favour of an understanding of closure which denotes 'the generation of structure, understood as the set of constraints governing the system's internal processes.'[43] (Poli, 2009: 8).

The idea of open systems originated as a thermodynamic concept (Morin, 2008:10). In thermodynamics, systems equilibrium equates to systems death as a constant source of energy is needed for system's maintenance. However, if systems are completely random, then they also have no capacity for complex behaviour. For living systems to function, they must, therefore, be in a state of disequilibrium or energetic flux, but must simultaneously retain a measure of stability and continuity. Ilya Prigogine, the Belgian chemist, and prominent complexity theorist, demonstrated this principle in his work on dissipative structure for which he received a Nobel Prize. Dissipative structures are '"pumped" chemical cells that never achieve equilibrium but oscillate between multiple states' (Horgan, 1995: 108). Prigogine and Stengers (1984: 143) state that these dissipative states – or the formation of new dynamic states of matter – illustrates '[t]he interaction of a system with the outside world, [and] its embedding in nonequilibrium conditions'. These nonequilibrium conditions further show that '[d]isorder does not simply destroy order, structure and organization but is also a condition of their formation and reformation' (Taylor, 2001: 121). Taylor (121) summarises the implications of this insight as follows: 'life depends on parasites as much as information depends on noise [or entropy].'

Two important points can be drawn from this description of open systems: firstly, the laws of the organisation of the living are laws of disequilibrium or stabilised dynamics; and secondly, the intelligibility of the system can only be understood in terms of its relation with the environment, which is not a relationship of simple dependence, but which is constitutive of the system (11). With regard to the system's relation with the environment (i.e. the second consequence), one must recognise that, methodologically, it is difficult to study open systems. This is because, as Morin (11) remarks, '[t]he environment is at the same time intimate and foreign: it is part of the system while remaining exterior to it'. Even though we can only know the environment in terms of the system, the environment should not be reduced to a feature of the system itself. Rather the environment should be viewed as something which stands apart from the system, but, nevertheless, interacts with the system, in order to constitute the system. In other words, a system and its environment should be treated as both a real, physical category, and a mental category or ideal model (Morin, 1992: 379). This consequence is further elaborated upon in section 5.3. At this stage,

[43] Openness, as understood from the perspective of autopoietic theory, retains its classical meaning of energy exchange with the environment (Poli, 2009: 8).

it is sufficient to take note of the crucial, yet complex role played by the environment in any sophisticated account of system's theory.

3. Complexity theory in organisation studies, leadership studies, and business ethics

Before introducing the paradigm of critical complexity, it is important to briefly investigate the impact of complexity theory in general. Complexity theory not only has a very diverse genealogy, but also a wide uptake in a number of applied fields. Of specific importance in the context, is the increasing significant role that complexity theory is playing in organisation studies, leadership studies, and even business ethics. As cited in the introduction to this study, Allen (2001: 29) attributes the reason for this to the fact that complexity theory offers an integrated, multidimensional approach, which can successfully be related to the real-world situation. As such, complexity theory provides a broader and richer alternative to the reductionist and partial theories that have been developed in, and applied to organisation and management studies over the last 30 years (Ghoshal, 2005: 88).

Although space does not allow for a detailed discussion of these developments, it is worthwhile to take note of the following contributions[44]: In the field of organisation and management studies, the work of Allen (2001; 2000), which is focused on evolutionary complex systems and the limits to modelling knowledge, has been significant. Lissack and Letiche's (2007) analysis on the importance of coherence, emergence, and resilience for a complexity theory of organisations and organisational identity has proved insightful. Stacey's (2003, 2001, 1996; 1995); and, Stacey, Griffen, and Shaw's (2000) work on complex responsive processes in organisations and management practices has also received much attention in these fields. In leadership studies, the work of Uhl-Bien (2006); Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey (2007); Lichtenstein and Plowman (2009); and, Plowman, Solansky, Beck, Baker, Kulkarni, and Travis (2007) should be noted. These theorists use complexity theory in order to develop a relational (as opposed to agent-centric) understanding of leadership, and to investigate the role of leadership in emergent, self-organising systems. In business ethics, Collier and Esteban (1999; 2000) have made important contributions in terms of illustrating the role that complex processes play in ethical leadership and governance practices; Maak and Pless (2006) have explored the concept of a complex, relational form of leadership, and what this implies for ethical and responsive leadership practices; and, Painter-

[44] This description presents a partial list of management theorists, leadership theorists, and business ethicists using complexity theory in their work. The references to their works are also merely illustrative of the type of subjects that they are tackling in their research, and by no means provide an exhaustive description of their research.

Morland (2008) has incorporated elements of complexity theory in her work on relational responsiveness, leadership, accountability, and business ethics management.

Despite the diversity of fields and topics covered, one common characteristic which differentiates the above-mentioned studies from other, more traditional contributions in the various fields is that the focus of analysis has shifted from individuals (whether they are construed as managers, leader, or ethical agents) to the processes and systems in which individuals partake. Individual behaviour is, therefore, analysed in terms of the influence that they exert on systemic structure through their various cooperative and competitive activities, but also in terms of the constraints that these systems and contexts exert on individual behaviour (see secs 5.2. & 6.2.). Due to the complexity of these processes, it is impossible to maintain the traditional Cartesian view of the subject as a '"knowing"' individual' who is 'understood as the architect and controller of an internal and external order' (Uhl-Bien, 2006: 655). This further has implications for how we model our realities. In this regard, Allen (2000: 88) argues that the simple and predictive models traditionally used in these fields, are 'bought' at the price of certain reductive assumptions. An important question that guides some of the above-mentioned studies is, therefore, what can we know about complex systems, and how do we deal with the unpredictable and non-linear consequences of our actions. As a theoretical approach, complexity theory does not offer what Preiser and Cilliers (2010: 276) call '"problem-solving tools and solutions kits"', but rather helps us to come to terms with the real-world problems that emerge because of complexity. More attention will be accorded to this discussion in section 6 of this chapter. At this point it is merely important to note that complexity theory has not only been influential in the hard sciences, but also in the social sciences, and that the uptake of complexity in the social sciences is a growing trend (as determined from the increasing number of references to complexity theory in organisation and management studies, leadership studies, and business ethics).

4. Introduction to critical complexity

In the previous sections, some of the movements that have had an influence on the development of critical complexity were briefly schematised, albeit not chronologically. Although critical complexity shares significant similarities with these movements (including the use and understanding of much of the terminology), there are also several ideological differences between critical complexity and these movements. As such, this section commences with a summary of the major insights derived from these various movements, followed by a discussion of how critical complexity differs from restricted complexity and systems theory specifically.

4.1. Summary of the influences on critical complexity

Below follows a list of the most important insights that emerged from the preceding discussion on cybernetics, restricted complexity, and systems theory. These insights have had a significant impact on our understanding of generalised or critical complexity:

- In focusing attention on the principles of entropy, information, and feedback, first-order cybernetics influenced the development of critical complexity theory through placing the emphasis on the *interactions* between objects (regardless of their nature), rather than on the objects themselves.
- Self-reflexivity (which characterises second-order cybernetics) brought forth a shift from observed systems to the observers of systems, which has impacted on our understanding of our ability to know complex systems (psychological complexity). Maturana and Varela's emphasis on autopoiesis has also influenced critical complexity theory, by drawing attention to questions regarding the relations between systems and the environment, as well as to the constitutive nature of systems.
- Third-order cybernetics (which focuses on artificial life) has significantly influenced critical complexity in introducing the concepts of self-organisation and emergence – both of which are central to any understanding of complex systems.
- The field of restricted complexity further developed the above ideas, and contributed to our understanding of complex systems through making important advances in terms of formalising and modelling complex systems.
- General systems theory – like cybernetics and restricted complexity – has provided important challenges to the mechanistic conception of the universe, and has greatly enriched our knowledge on the organisation of systems (as a set of elements standing in interaction amongst themselves and with the environment).

Despite the positive influence that the above movements have had on the development of critical complexity, critical complexity also differs in important respects from these movements. Below, follows a brief discussion of the most important differences between critical complexity versus restricted complexity and general systems theory.

4.2. Critical complexity vs. restricted complexity: the problem of reductionism

In section 2.2., it was argued that restricted complexity or a Theory of Everything still remains within the epistemology of the classical sciences. In this paradigm, the explanatory principle is the principle of reduction, which is supported by the principle of disjunction (that consists in separating cognitive difficulties from one another) and the principle of universal determinism (that is, the idea that deterministic principles govern the course of cosmic events, past and future) (Morin, 2007: 5). Although it is conceded that the world is a complicated affair, within this paradigm the phenomenon of complexity (10) is never seriously questioned. This is because – following the syllogism mentioned in section 2.2. – it is believed that, with a lot of hard work and computational power, we can expose a set of simple rules that underlie complex systems. On this understanding, complexity is related to original simplicity (Rasch, 1991: 69) and one, therefore, 'recognizes complexity by decomplexifying it' (Morin, 2007: 10).

In order to further support this argument, consider Holland's (1998: 24-26) approach to complexity, which is based on formal models consisting of 'atomistic building blocks... whose interactions are determined by a set of formal production rules'. Holland views these models as descriptions of reality, although he also talks of rule-governed models. This, according to Cilliers (2000: 43), suggests that formal rules are fundamental to complex systems. Cilliers (43) criticises Holland's view of complexity, arguing that something which can be fully-understood in terms of a set of rules, can at best be understood as complicated. As explained in the introduction, the term critical complexity (Cilliers, 2010a) or generalised complexity (Morin, 2007) takes account of the nature of complexity itself[45], which characterises systems that are 'the result of countless, local nonlinear, non-algorithmic, dynamic interactions, [which]... cannot be described completely in terms of a set of rules' (Cilliers, 2000: 46).

In this context, non-linearity means that systems cannot be compressed without discounting some of the complexity. Any model of a complex system, will, therefore, exclude a degree of complexity (43). Furthermore, one cannot determine in advance the significance of that which has been omitted

[45] This broader understanding of complexity – which takes seriously the implications of non-linear, emergent behaviour – is not new: indeed Weaver (in Morin, 2007: 11) already stated in 1948 that whereas the 19th century was the century of disorganised complexity (which refers to the eruption of the second law of thermodynamics and its consequences for our understanding of entropy), the twentieth century must be the century of organised complexity (which refers to the idea that systems are inherently complex due to their organising processes). Similarly, the biologist, Robert Rosen (who described evolution in terms of a complexifying process), is another early theorist who supports the idea of organised complexity, and who identifies – and asserts himself against traditional science – which he describes as having the goal of resolving 'a given system into a spectrum of subsystems, and to reconstruct the properties of the entire system from those of the subsystems into which it has resolved' (Rosen, 1985: 322).

from the model, because unlike linear phenomena (where the system is the additive result of its components), complex, nonlinear phenomena interact with the environment in intricate and complex ways, which results in novel and often surprising configurations of the system's components. It is, therefore, not clear where the boundaries of the system are (Dyke & Dyke 2002: 72; Cilliers, 2000: 43). As such, Cilliers (46-47) is of the opinion that although we cannot avoid using rules, formal rule-based systems (such as described by Holland) cannot fully capture complexity. This point is supported by Rosen's (1985: 424) work on 'encodings' (or representations/models), in which a system is defined as complex precisely 'to the extent that it admits non-equivalent encodings; encodings which cannot be reduced to one another.'

Compounding the matter further, is the fact that complexity is also generated by the descriptions that we give to systems: in other words, complexity is generated by a reflexive mode of investigation, or 'from the number of ways in which we are able to interact with a system' (322). Therefore, following a reductive mode of investigation not only results in the negation of systemic complexity, but also obviates the difficulties associated with a process of observation. In this regard, Dyke (1988: 5) writes: 'Not only are the phenomenon to be studied complex, but scientific practice itself is a phenomenon of organized complexity. The complexity of the investigation must be studied along with the complexities investigated.' As such, the central insight to emerge from this discussion is that we need to account for the manner in which we generate models, as well as the status of these models (this point is elaborated upon in section 6.1).

4.3. Critical complexity vs. systems theory: the problem of holism

Morin (2008: 10) summarises the virtues of systems theory as: placing the notion of the system (construed not as an elementary discreet unity, but as a complex whole) at the centre of the theory; conceiving of the system in 'ambiguous, ghostly' terms, rather than real, formal terms; and, situating the study of systems at an interdisciplinary level, which allows for both the unity of science (under the general banner of systems theory) and the differentiation of sciences (according to the material nature of the objects under investigation, as well as the types and complexities of organisational phenomena). Despite these virtues, one finds that much of the work in this field is also characterised by the problem of reductionism. However, unlike the traditional scientific approach (in which the basic constituting elements are studied in order to gain knowledge of a composite (Morin, 2007: 5)), systems theorists tend to simplify and reduce the constituting elements to the composite. More specifically, systems theorists are often guilty of employing the principle of holism. Morin (1992: 372) offers the following description of holism:

> Holism is a partial, one-dimensional, and simplifying vision of the whole. It reduces all other systems-related ideas to the idea of the totality, whereas it should be a question of confluence. Holism thus arises from the paradigm of simplification (or reduction of the complex to a master-concept or master-category).

Instead of conceiving of systems in terms of a global unity, Morin (373) argues that we should view systems and their component parts in terms of a '*unitas multiplex*' where 'antagonistic terms are necessarily coupled'. The terms or parts remain antagonistic to the extent that they retain their own individual identities that cannot be reduced to one another or to the whole. At the same time, however, the coupling of the parts implies a common identity, which constitutes their citizenship in the system. In other words, the parts have a double-identity (373). Therefore, the 'system is not only a composition of unity out of diversity, but also a composition of internal diversity out of unity' (373). When thinking about systems, this double-identity needs to be accounted for, because – on the one hand – if we forego the diversity-principle, our thinking becomes increasingly homogenised (holism); and – on the other hand – if we forego the unity-principle, our 'thinking becomes a mere catalogue and loses unity' (373).

However, taking cognisance of this double-identity is not enough: Morin (374) states that we should also account for the complex character of these interrelations. This means not only respecting the age-old truism that 'the whole is greater than the sum of the parts', but also that 'the whole is less than the sum of the parts' (since some of the qualities of the parts are suppressed under the constraints that result from systems organisation); and, that 'the whole is greater than the whole'. This last systemic feature is due to the dynamic organisation or emergence that takes place in systems where local interactions allow for global structure, which – in turn – feed back to constrain the behaviour of the parts through a process of downward causation (374) (see secs 5.2. & 6.2.).

In summary: in contrast to reductionism and holism, critical complexity requires that one try to comprehend the relation between the whole and the parts. What is important here is the *relation* itself: knowledge of the whole is not enough, and knowledge of the parts is not enough. One must substitute the principle of reductionism with a principle that conceives of whole-part mutual interaction (Morin, 2007: 10).

5. Features of critical complexity[46]

Having traced a selective history of complexity, and having made a couple of critical comments on how the paradigm of critical complexity compares with some of the movements that characterise this history, we are now in a position to elaborate on a number of features that constitute the paradigm of critical complexity. However, before doing so, it is important to note that the concept of a 'paradigm' comes with its own difficulties. Whilst it is impossible to formulate the premises of a meta-paradigm (that is, a superior system which is both meta-human and meta-social (Morin, 2008: 51)), the paradigm of critical complexity does claim a certain '*universality* for its grasp of its object in the sense that it deals with [all complex systems] and not just sections' (Luhmann, 1995: xlvii). However, the paradigm of critical complexity simultaneously 'claims *neither* to *reflect* the complete reality of its object, *nor* to *exhaust* all the possibilities of knowing its object' (xlvii). Allen (2000: 78) describes this difficulty in terms of a paradox: on the one hand we wish to gather systemic knowledge about the objects of study; yet, on the other hand, the objects of study are characterised as intricate or hard (indeed, impossible!) to unravel.

The features of critical complexity described in this section are meant to illuminate aspects of our reality 'exactly like the towers in a concentration camp, which were built to allow the captors to better look at the society and its outside environment' (Morin, 2008: 50). However, it must also be kept in mind that the paradigm of critical complexity demands an attitude of modesty on the part of the theorist, and a concession that we are also captives in our theoretical models in that 'complex thought requires the integration of the observer and the conceiver in its observation and conception' (51). Having provided this caveat, the analysis can proceed with a summary of the features of critical complexity:

5.1. Complex systems are not complicated systems

Cilliers (1998: 3) states that an important distinction exists between complicated and complex systems[47]: whereas a complicated system may initially look complex (due to the large number of components that may constitute the system, and/or the sophistication of the tasks that the systems can perform), the hallmark of a complicated system is that it is – in principle – solvable. In other

[46] For a description of how these features correspond with the insights of affirmative postmodernism, see: McKelvey, 2002: 13-14.
[47] Also see Richardson (2001; 2002) for a description of the differences between complex and complicated systems.

words, given enough information and resources, the dynamics of a complicated system can be fully understood. Cilliers (3) offers the jumbo jet as an example of a complicated system.

As opposed to complicated systems, complex systems are 'constituted by such intricate sets of non-linear relationships and feedback loops that only certain aspects of them can be understood at a time' (3). Following Weaver (see footnote 45), we can state that complex systems display organised complexity (which, as explained earlier, means that systems are inherently complex due to their organising processes). Since only certain aspects of complex systems can be understood at a time, it also means that complex systems are not reducible or compressible (or, to reiterate Rosen's (1985) words, a system is complex precisely 'to the extent that it admits non-equivalent encodings; encodings which cannot be reduced to one another). Moreover, because complex systems cannot be fully understood, our descriptions of complex systems cause further distortions. In other words, we model complex systems in order to better understand them, but since our models are imperfect renditions of complex systems, they introduce further uncertainties. Luhmann (2000: 46) describes this consequence of modelling as a paradox:

> The self-description of the self-transparent system has to use the form of a paradox, a form with infinite burdens of information and it has to look for one or more distinguishable identities that "unfold" the paradox, reduce the amount of needed information, construct redundancies, and transform unconditioned into conditioned knowledge… [but] the question of the unity of the distinction always leads back to the paradox – and one can show this to others and accept it for oneself.

The issue at stake here is not so much the paradox itself: if we concede to the fact that the world is complex, then the paradox of framing or modelling is part of the complexity with which we have to grapple. In other words, we have to frame. Rather, the issue is whether we accept the paradoxical status of frames (or, in Luhmann's words, whether 'one can show this to others and accept it for oneself.')

It is clear from the preceding analysis that those wishing to create unified theories of complexity are of the opinion that complex systems are merely complicated systems. In other words, complexity – in their eyes – is a function of our knowledge (epistemology) rather than an inherent characteristic of certain systems (ontology). It is believed that, with enough computing power, we will be able to establish the laws of complexity. Admittedly, the distinction between complicated and complex systems is often undermined in practice by powerful new technologies, where complex phenomena

turns out (on further inspection) to be merely complicated (Cilliers, 1998: 3). However, despite the fact that the distinction between complicated and complex systems cannot be drawn in any unproblematic manner, the distinction, nevertheless, remains a useful analytical tool as it determines whether the study of complexity constitutes a search for underlying mathematical rules and formulae, or whether the study of complexity constitutes a considered engagement with complexity (Cilliers, 1998; Morin, 2007).

Whereas the former group of complexity theorists implicitly accepts the scientific ideals of explanation, prediction, and facilitation of control (Chu et al., 2003), the latter group tries to develop strategies and models to help us better deal with the complexity that characterises not only living systems, but also social systems. In terms of ethics, one can state that those who seek meta-frames (constituted by categorically-binding moral laws) to map out the moral world follow a restricted approach to ethical complexity, whereas those who attempt to engage with the contingencies and provisionality that characterise our moral experiences treat ethical complexity as an instance of critical complexity.

5.2. Complex systems display emergent behaviour due to dynamic self-organisation

5.2.1. Interactions in complex systems

In sections 4.3., the complex nature of the interactions (or more generally, the interrelations) between systems and their components was elaborated upon. The main insight derived from this section is that systemic relations are complex relations, meaning that they cannot be described by the principle of reduction (i.e. explaining the whole in terms of the parts), or by the principle of holism (i.e. explaining the parts in terms of the whole). This is, in part, due to the diversity and entropy which characterises open systems.

Equally important, however, is the non-linear dynamic organisation or emergence that takes place in systems where local interactions allow for global structures. As such, the interaction between systemic components can be described in terms of the following additional features (Cilliers, 1998: 3-4): the interactions between the components of a system can be physical or informational; the interactions are fairly rich 'i.e. any element in the system influences and is influenced by quite a few other ones' (3); the interactions have a short range, but these local interactions can have large systemic effects, which implies that systems-level order emerges because of interactions amongst

components at lower levels of the system (Andersen 1999); and, there are positive (stimulating) and negative (inhibiting) feedback loops in the interactions.

This last feature is also referred to as 'organizational recursion' (Morin, 2008: 49), where a recursive process is defined as 'a process where the products and the effects are at the same time causes and producers of what produces them' (49). Therefore, just like the interactions between components create systemic structures and constraints, so too feedback loops allow for the system itself to constrain the behaviour of the parts by means of framing the identity of the components in a systemic context. Morin (50) uses the idea of the hologram to explain this last point: '[i]n a physical hologram, the smallest point of the hologram image contains the quasi-totality of information of the represented object. [Therefore,] not only is the part in the whole, but the whole is also in the part.' Morin (50) offers the example of society to illustrate this point: not only do individuals produce society through their interactions, but from as early as childhood, society enters us through a process of socialisation, which supplies us with language and culture (50).

5.2.2. Structure, self-organisation and emergence

When the components of systems interact, dynamic structures emerge over time due to self-organisation. Self-organisation can be defined as 'a process whereby a system can develop a complex structure from fairly unstructured beginnings' (Cilliers 1998: 12). Contrary to popular opinion, complex systems are not flat systems. In other word, '[c]omplex systems are neither homogenous nor chaotic' (Cilliers, 2001: 139). Instead, the interactions between components create systemic structures (including nested systems within the larger system (Ashmos & Huber 1987)). Whereas some structures are more durable, others are more volatile and ephemeral (Cilliers, 2001: 140). Cilliers (1998: 89) defines the notion of structure as:

> the internal mechanism developed by the system to receive, encode, transform and store information on the one hand, and to react to such information by some form of output on the other.

In order to make the case for self-organisation, it is necessary to show that 'internal structure can evolve without the intervention of an external designer or the presence of some centralised form of internal control' (89). In other words, one must show that complex, self-organising systems are emergent, where emergence is defined as a quality that is 'indeductible from the qualities of the parts, and thus irreducible' (Morin, 2007: 12). This is only possible if we treat the concept of self-

organisation not merely as a structural concept, but also as a temporal concept: a self-organising system must not only have structure, but also a history. Complex systems must be able to 'learn' from experience, and 'remember' past encounters (Cilliers, 1998: 92). Cilliers (92) explains that '[i]f more 'previous information' can be stored, the system will be able to make better comparisons. This increase in complexity implies a local reversal of entropy, which necessitates a flow of information through the system.' It is, therefore, only possible for systems to develop complex structures by processing information, and developing 'memory'. The example of neural networks offers a good explanation of this principle: neural networks are chemically-connected or functionally-associated neurons. The interconnections between these neurons are called synapses. Over time, certain pathways are established in the brain, meaning that some of the synapses are reinforced through impulses, whereas others die off. In this way, structure develops as 'groups [of neurons] are selected, altered and maintained in a dynamic way through interaction with the environment' (105). This implies that a fairly undifferentiated brain develops structure or consciousness over time.

What should be clear from the above description is that the structural and temporal dimensions of self-organisation (as an emergent process) do not allow for an understanding of complexity in terms of absolute thresholds (as implied by von Neuman's use of the term 'complexity barrier'). It is not the case that simple systems suddenly start showing emergent behaviour. As soon as dynamic and complex interactions between systemic components exist, systems start developing structures. However, complexity is also not an additive process, since the interactions between components are non-linear and allow for surprising reconfigurations of systemic structures. As such, trying to pinpoint optimal levels of organisation, through recourse to terms such as 'self-organised criticality', again denies a measure of complexity.

5.3. Complex systems interact with their environment in ways that constitute the system itself

The principle of homeostasis that underlies both the cybernetics paradigm and autopoietic systems is grounded in the supposition that systems are operationally-closed (that is, systems facilitate their own production and maintenance through feedback loops). Over and against this view, Prigogine's work on dissipative structures shows that living systems are open systems. Without a constant exchange of energy with the environment, systems are likely to reach an equilibrium point and die. To reiterate: disequilibrium is an essential feature of complex systems, because it is a precondition for self-organisation and system's survival (Cilliers, 1998: 4).

Morin (2008: 49) calls this feature of complex systems the 'dialogic principle'. The dialogic principle combines the idea of structure, order, and stability with disorder, degradation, and change. Morin (49) explains this term with reference to the two types of chemico-physical entities with which we are born, namely DNA and amino-acids: on the one hand, DNA represents a stable entity, which carries memory and is hereditary; on the other hand, amino-acids – which live in contact with the environment – are extremely unstable and are constantly degrading, in order to recreate themselves from messages that emanate from the DNA. Therefore, counter-intuitively, we would not be alive if it was not for the fact that our organism constantly degrades its energy, in order to produce new cells (Morin, 2007: 16). In this regard, Morin (16) recalls the illuminating phrase spoken by Heraclitus in the 6th century BC: 'live of death, die of life'. Morin (2008: 49) further writes that we should understand these two logics, 'that of transindividual reproduction and that of individual existence here and now', as both complementary and antagonistic. In other words, we must think in terms of a double logic.

With regard to living organisms, the idea of open systems can be adequately explained with reference to the second law of thermodynamics. However, applying this insight to social systems creates a problem: according to Luhmann, social systems are necessarily operationally-closed, in that the system and the environment can only be known from the observer's perspective. In defining a social system, the observer not only constitutes the system, but also defines herself and the environment in terms of the given system. Therefore, the observer constitutes the observation in as much as the observation constitutes the observer (Arnoldi, 2001: 5; see also: Luhmann, 1996: 24; 1995: 76). Additionally, there can be no external point from which to talk about a system, and new operations can only be built upon the system's own previous operations. In other words, observation is a reflexive process, which never stabilises, and which generates additional complexity precisely because '[a]n observing system observes itself failing to observe itself fully' (Rasch, 1991: 77; see also: Luhmann, 1990: 83). For Luhmann, there can, in other words, be no breach in a system.

Over-and-against this perspective, Derrida's work on deconstruction and the double-movement, as well as his use of terms such as *différance* and trace all present attempts to find a breach or gap in the system. As described in the next chapter (see sec. 3.2.), this breach constitutes the event as an experience of the impossible. Caputo (1997a: 51) writes that the impossible should not be understood as the modal opposite of the possible, but as a rupture or a passage to the limits. In this regard, he states that '[t]he desire of deconstruction for the more-than-possible impossible is a passion that it shares with apophatic theology' (51). This breach also functions according to the dialogic principle: the impossible is mediated through the possible. The moment of the event is both

an experience of the possible (that is, of calculation, stability, and order), and a momentary transgression of the possible. As such, Derrida's philosophy provides an opening for thinking of social systems as open systems. However, this opening cannot be thought of logically, but demands a complex thinking. With regard to *différance*, Teubner (2001: 41) writes:

> The open dance of heterogeneous operations, the infinite network of relations, the interplay of various aspects which occurs continuously without transferring them to a closed system – these are dangerous supplements to autopoietic closure. This understanding of *différance* cannot be systematically integrated into autopoiesis, it comes from outside as a threatening affliction of closed systems.

This point can only be fully grasped once the theory of deconstruction is adequately explained (chapter 4), and the understanding of deconstruction as a complex position is clearly elucidated (chapter 5 and 6). However, it is important to introduce the reader to the two main camps with regard to system-environment interactions, as this distinction holds implications for how we view the ethics of complexity[48]. Although Luhmann's work undoubtedly holds important insights for conceptualising social systems as radically immanent systems, the problem with endorsing a strong view of recursivity (where a system maintains itself in terms of its own operationally-closed systems) is that it leads to solipsistic or relativist implications. As such, Derrida's work presents an important step in thinking about the relation between systems and their environments in more open terms. This study, therefore, simultaneously takes seriously the implications that our embedded, complex, and immanent perspectives hold for the status of our knowledge claims (Luhmann's position), and the implications that arise from attempting to think beyond this conceptual, logical level (Derrida's position).

Although the purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of the paradigm of complexity, the ethics of complexity is briefly introduced in the concluding section. In this regard, specific attention is accorded to the importance of choice in modelling complex systems, the embeddedness of ethical practices, and the provisional nature of ethical knowledge[49] – in order to summarise the implications that the above analysis holds for understanding the ethics of complexity.

[48] This issue is revisted and explored in more detail in chapter six, section 2.
[49] These three categories correspond closely to the three postmodern tenets introduced in chapter two, section 6.

6. Introduction to the ethics of critical complexity

Preiser and Cilliers (2010: 278) write that complexity theory 'is ultimately not a strategy that aims at finding perfect solutions for unsolvable questions'. Rather, as stated by Richardson and Cilliers (2001: 22), it presents us with a conceptual strategy that 'helps us in coming to terms with the ethical problems associated with complex (social) systems.' In this last section, the ethics of critical complexity is explicated[50] in order to introduce the reader to this conceptual strategy.

6.1. The importance of choice in modelling complex systems

The first ethical point to emerge from the above discussion relates to the fact that the theory of critical complexity requires an epistemological shift (Morin, 2007:10). In other words, we must rethink the nature and limits of knowledge. As stated earlier, our models of complex systems are always incomplete, and may introduce further uncertainties. Therefore, instead of trying to represent reality in formal terms, the critical complexity theorist has as her goal the establishment of models that accord with her experiences of the world. In this regard, a model is more like a novel than a formula in that:

> like a novel, [a model] may resonate with nature, but it is not the "real" thing. Like a novel, a model may be convincing – it may "ring true" if it is consistent with our experiences of the natural [and the social] world. But just as we may wonder how much the characters in a novel are drawn from real life, and how much is artifice, we might ask the same of a model: how much is based on observation and measurement of accessible phenomena, how much is based on informed judgement, and how much is based on convenience? (Oreskes, Shrader-Frechette & Belitz, 1994: 644).

Oreskes and her colleagues, although not directly referring to the problem of complexity, are sensitive to the fact that we do not have full access to the phenomena of interest. This lack of full access is due to the complexity with which we have to grapple, and introduces questions of

[50] This objective (namely, to determine the *specific* challenge that critical complexity holds for our understanding of ethics) raises an important question, namely, can one use a general model of a complex system to describe both living systems (such as cells) and social systems. A danger of generalising complexity is that the theory itself is at risk of becoming unfalsifiable. In this sense, the term 'complexity' operates as a sophisticated metaphor: it can be considered as a generic marker, but complexity is, simultaneously, case-specific. Complexity, therefore, deals with both similarities and dissimilarities between systems. The challenge for the social scientist is to simultaneously think these paradoxical aspects of complexity. In this regard, also see Lissack and Letiche's (2002: 71-81) discussion on homologies (which they define as metaphors that can withstand critical examination).

convenience and judgement, neither of which are questions of description, but of normativity. How we frame systems (in other words, the boundaries that we draw around systems) are not just a function of the activity of the system itself, but are also a product of the description that we give to the system (Cilliers, 2001:141). Luhmann (2000: 46) defines boundaries or frames as 'the self-produced and reproduced difference between a system and its environment'. Our boundaries are, therefore, to a large extent, contingent upon the resources at our disposal: we do not frame objective reality, but our own observations (46). Conceptually-speaking, there is no logical way out of this problem, or otherwise stated, there is no grand Theory of Frames.

Rosen (2005: 42) also remarks on this problem in his description of the notion of systemhood in science, in which the environment is typically reduced to the system. In this regard, he writes: '[t]he partition of ambience into system and environment, and even more, the imputation of that partition to the ambience itself as an inherent property thereof, is a basic though fateful step for science'. Although partitioning the world into systems and environments is a fateful step, it is also a necessary step, since as Quine (1969: 55) reminds us in his work on ontological relativity, '[w]e cannot know what something is without knowing how it is marked off from other things.' In other words, boundaries are also *enabling*: we need to construct boundaries between systems and their environments, even though these boundaries introduce further complexities and uncertainties (since our descriptions are imperfect) (see Cilliers, 2001).

However, the problem comes in when this weak form of reductionism transforms into a strong form of reductionism. This happens when the scientist negates the problem of organised complexity in an attempt to determine:

> special classes of systems into which the ambience may be partitioned, such that (1) the systems in that special class are more directly apprehensible than others, and (2) everything in the ambience… is generated by, or reducible to, what happens in that fundamental class (Rosen, 2005: 42).

Once this distinction is made, all attention is focused on the system (at the expense of the environment), and all properties of the given system are described in terms of the system as a whole. In other words, when the problem of operational closure is viewed as a systemic feature and not as an observational-difficulty, one is led 'to a vision of the world that is classificatory, analytical, [and] reductionist, with linear causality' (interpretation of Maruyama in Morin, 2008: 12).

Allen (2000: 80-81) also discusses the problem of strong reductionism in the social sciences, specifically the management sciences. In this context, he identifies the following five reductionist assumption: 1) we can clearly define the boundaries between the system and the environment; 2) we already possess rules needed to classify objects into relevant typologies, which will enable us to understand what is going on; 3) individuals are considered as average types that are not affected by experiences; 4) individual behaviours can be described by their average interaction parameters; and, 5) stability or equilibrium defines reality. Many of these same reductions are made in the standard normative tale, where it is assumed that the rational individual is capable of engaging in abstract ethical thought, and, thereby, capable of coming to appropriate ethical conclusions, which can then be applied to a situation. Allen (81) notes that the problem with these reductions are that they do not allow us to represent evolution and learning within systems, or to describe systemic transformations.

The fact that our models cannot provide a full description of reality does not, however, imply that we should forego modelling. In the previous chapter (sec. 6.2.1.), Clegg et al. (2007) was cited as saying that choice does not involve complete free play, but an oscillation between possibilities. Allen (2000: 93) makes a similar point with regard to the modelling of complex systems: '[a] representation or model with no assumptions whatsoever is clearly simply subjective reality…. In this way, we could say that it does not therefore fall within the science of complexity, since it does not concern systemic knowledge.' Allen continues in arguing that what is of importance 'is not whether something is absolutely true or false, but whether the apparent systemic knowledge being provided is *useful.*' Instead of viewing models as absolute representations of reality, we must be aware of, and 'apply our "complexity reduction" assumptions honestly' (94) and take note of when these models need to be transformed and replaced by other more appropriate models. Allen's point reinforces both Cilliers' (2005) statement that the modest position is a responsible position, and Verstraeten's point (2000) that such a position requires work: one must actively develop the skill to 'see with new eyes', as Proust states (see chap. 1, secs 6.1. & 6.2.). In acknowledging complexity we, therefore, acknowledge the limited status of our models. Here, the emphasis shifts from discovering truth to a process of making choices and developing strategies for living, and for dealing with the often unexpected outcomes of these strategies. Morin (2007: 21; my italics) elaborates on this point in stating that:

> There is no science of science, and even the science of science would be insufficient if it did not include epistemological problems. Science is a tumultuous building site, science is a process that could not be programmed in advance, because one can never program what one

> will find, since the characteristic of a discovery is in its unexpectedness. This uncontrolled process has led today to the development of potentialities of destruction and manipulation, which *must bring the introduction into science of a double conscience: a conscience of itself and an ethical conscience*.

In developing an ethical conscience, the scientist must, therefore, learn to take responsibility for her choices. Our models are the outcome of framing strategies, which, as Allen (2000: 102) notes, represent possible choices amongst others, where each choice gives rise to 'a different spectrum of possible consequences, different successes and failures, and different strengths and weaknesses' – most of which can probably not be known beforehand. Therefore, although we must exercise vigilance when choosing our strategies, we should also recognise that no matter how carefully we consider and reflect upon these actions, they may turn out to be a mistake (Preiser & Cilliers, 2010: 274). Preiser and Cilliers (274) summarise the implication of this point as follows:

> acknowledging that values and choice are involved [therefore] does not provide any guarantee that good will come of what we do. Complexity tells us that ethics will be involved, but does not tell us what that ethics actually entails. The ethics of complexity is thus radically or perpetually ethical… We do not escape the realm of choice.

In summary, critical complexity cannot be construed as a value-free programme, aimed at establishing *a priori* laws and rules through reductive reasoning. This is because such a conception is not only a negation of complexity, but also 'destroys the autonomy of one who seeks' (Morin, 2007: 28). Engaging with the problematic of complexity, therefore, necessitates what Morin (28) calls 'an autonomous strategy' which obliges us 'in the field of action… to reconsider our decisions like bets and incites us to develop an adequate strategy to more or less control the action.'

6.2. The embeddedness of ethical practices[51]

What should be clear from the above analysis is that our models of the world have a profound impact on the way in which we view the world, and the status that we accord to our knowledge claims. Furthermore, the models we subscribe to not only have theoretical, but also practical and ethical implications. As an illustration of this point, Preiser and Cilliers (2010: 278) refer to the disastrous effects that reductive thinking has had on the social, political, environmental, and

[51] The insights that complexity theory holds for our ethical practices is illustrated in chapter seven (sec. 2) at the hand of the example of corporate social responsibility/corporate citizenship.

economic spheres. What this point implies is that if one subscribes to a critical complexity model of the world, one also has to accept the consequences that this model holds, in terms of ontology (including how we are to view our own identities), as well as in terms of the ethics of our practices.

In much of the ethical literature, moral responsibility is ascribed to rational and autonomous individual agents who make decisions based on reasonable principles and calculations. It is also commonly assumed that these moral agents act intentionally. In other words, it is assumed that there is 'a direct cause and effect relationship between the willing and acting agent and the consequences of his or her decisions and behavior' (Painter-Morland 2006: 90). Such a view identifies individuals as ontologically prior to the systems in which they function, due to the fact that the identity conditions of individuals (namely, intentionality, autonomy, and rationality) are assumed to be *a priori* givens (Woermann, 2010: 178). What should be clear at this juncture, however, is that individual identity is not an *a priori* construct but a relational and emergent property. In other words, identities must be contextualised in terms of a spatial network of relationships in which they are co-constituted, as well as in terms of a temporal process of becoming (Woermann, 2010; Cilliers, 2010b).

What this means is that the focus of any ethical analysis should not be on individual agents, but on relations between individuals and the systemic properties that emerge from these relations. Through participating in competitive and cooperative activities, the intentional and unintentional actions of individuals give rise to certain patterns of behaviour, which is turn lead to the emergence of systemic structures. Systemic structures, on their part, serve to constrain the behaviour of individual components through feedback loops, but also create opportunities in the structure and thereby facilitate purposive action (see sec. 5.2.2.). Over time, these feedback loops reinforce or undermine certain patterns of behaviour, which then become institutionalised in formal or informal rules, norms, policies, laws etc. Radical systemic transformations are, however, possible due to the non-linearity (Woermann, 2010; Grebe & Woermann, 2010). This means that, although there cannot be a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the actions of an intentional agent and the consequences of her actions upon a system; we can, nevertheless, help shape and transform our systems through engaging in 'morally imaginative arrangements' that 'emerge through dialectical processes that are influenced by actors' relative power and political skill' (Hargrave, 2009: 87).

This process of identity formation reaffirms the point made in the previous chapter (sec. 6.3.) that the questions 'what ought I to do?' and 'what type of person should I be?' are inseparable, given the embeddedness of our practices and identities. In other words, individuals and the systems within

which they participate are co-terminus i.e. they arise and die together (see Seabright & Kurke, 1997).The moral agent should, therefore, not be construed 'as an independent or socially isolated decision-maker, but rather as a social actor embedded in a complex network of intra- and inter-group relationships' (Kramer, 1991: 195). This means that if we wish to talk about intentionality and moral agency, we can only do so by considering the specific 'context of relevant group memberships, the systems within which groups are embedded, the power relations that exist between groups and the permeability of boundaries that define group membership' (Paulsen, 2003:17). Preiser and Cilliers (2010: 268) sum up this insight for business ethics as follows:

> "Ethics" is not something that gets integrated into organisational or corporate culture but lies at the heart of establishing and envisioning a culture to begin with; it is part of all the different levels of activities in an organisation. The ethical stance is not something imposed on an organisation, or something that is expected of it. It is an inevitable result of the inability of a theory of complexity to provide a complete description of all aspects of the system.

6.3. The provisional nature of ethical knowledge

Thus far, two important ethical insights have emerged from the discussion on the ethics of critical complexity. Firstly, from this perspective, cognisance must be taken of the normativity of our models, which results from our incomplete understanding of complex phenomena; and, secondly, ethics is something that can only be understood in terms of dynamic, nonlinear, emergent, and relational practices and group dynamics. When we put these two insights together we come to the third important insight, namely that since no objective reality exists, all knowledge claims must be accepted as provisional claims because, in the words of Preiser and Cilliers (2010: 270): 'We *know* that we cannot get it right.'

Nevertheless, the fact that objective knowledge does not exist does not mean that we are incapable of purposive action. More specifically, it was argued in the previous chapter (sec. 6.1.) that limited knowledge does not equal any knowledge, and that the lack of an objective, meta-perspective cannot serve as an excuse for ethical sloppiness. Furthermore, employing models and rules is what allows us to undertake meaningful actions. However, we should be aware of the fact that these tools are not timeless or fixed. As such, our knowledge claims (which are based on our models and rules) should be the result of, and subject to, careful reflection (271), and – as stated in the previous chapter (sec. 6.1.1.) – one of the most important goals of studies in ethics (especially business

ethics) should be to teach students to reflect. Here again, we see the important role played by critique, especially self-critique. Only by being critical of our own positions is it possible to make our value judgements explicit, articulate alternative to these positions, and avoid claiming a false objectivity (274).

Preiser and Cilliers (283) offer the following three characteristics of the critical position[52]:

- 'A critical position informed by complexity will have to be *transgressive*. It can never simply re-enforce that which is current. Transformation takes place continually, despite all efforts to contain it.'
- 'A critical position will, in the most positive sense of the word, be an *ironical* position. There is no final truth which operationalises our actions in an objective way. Irony also implies, in a very systemic way, a self-critical position.'
- 'In the third place, a central role for the imagination is indispensable when we deal with complex things. Since we cannot calculate what will or should happen, we have to make a creative leap in order to imagine what things could be like.'

Since the aim of this section was merely to introduce the ethics of complexity, these ideas will not be explored in any greater detail at this stage. However, the above conception of ethics as a transgressive, ironical, and imaginative activity is important because it allows us to rethink the value of normative ethical theories in terms of the critical enterprise. Although not all normative ethical theories are compatible with the critical enterprise, theories such as deconstruction are. The value of such a theory lies in its ability to become a 'mechanism' for critically and carefully negotiating ethical complexity. As such, the above three characteristics will be returned to in chapter six (sec 3). In this chapter, the critical enterprise will be elaborated in more detail with specific reference to both complexity theory and deconstructive insights.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter, the history of complexity theory was investigated in order to introduce and contextualise the paradigm of critical complexity, and to put into question the traditional scientific paradigm of reduction, disjunction, and simplification. In this regard, theories such as cybernetics

[52] It may be asked how the transgressive and ironical attitude that typifies the critical position can be reconciled with the modesty that underlies responsible action in complex systems. In this regard, it is argued that modesty is the impetus of the critical position. To be modest means to try and overcome or transgress the limitations of one's conceptual schema. Furthermore, modesty means to adopt a self-deprecating humour, and to not take oneself or one's ideas too seriously, as this may prevent one from exercising the openness and tolerance needed to act responsibly in the face of complexity.

and information theory, autopoiesis, and artificial life; restricted complexity and chaos theory; and, systems theory were analysed, in order to reveal both similarities and differences to critical complexity. What emerged from the discussion was a view of complexity that presents a radical challenge to the manner in which we view not only natural systems, but also the nature of 'reality' itself – because, as Morin (2008: 34) writes:

> What affects a paradigm, that is, the vault key of a whole system of thought, affects the ontology, the methodology, the epistemology, the logic, and by consequence, the practices, the society, and the politics.

What is of interest in the context of this study is the implications that critical complexity theory hold for our understanding and practice of ethics in general, and business ethics in particular. To this end, the main ethical insights to emerge from this perspective were briefly summarised in the last section. It was argued that if we forego the idea of a universal, contextless ethics in favour of a complex view of ethics, then ethics becomes an inherent property of the descriptions and decisions that we make, and of the actions that we undertake. This is both because these descriptions, decisions, and actions cannot adequately account for complexity (i.e. they are incomplete), and because, in an emergent and relational context, we are (in part) constituted by our views and practices. As such, we have an ethical responsibility to take care in choosing the frameworks that guide our actions, and be critically aware of when these frameworks are in need of revision.

Allen (2000: 10) argues that in a radically immanent and complex world, the best one can hope to do is 'to put in place the mechanisms that allow us always to question our "knowledge" and continue exploring. We must try to imagine possible futures, and carry on modifying our views about reality and about what it is that we want.' A central premise of this study is that the theory of deconstruction provides one such mechanism for questioning and continually exploring our knowledge claims. Thus, in the following chapter, the theory of deconstruction is presented. In chapter five, it will be shown that by treating deconstruction as an instance of a complex ethics, several important insights emerge for our understanding and practice of business ethics.

Chapter 4:

Reading Derrida: On the (Im)Possibility of an Alternative Tale

1. Introduction

The term 'deconstruction' is notoriously difficult to define. Indeed, Derrida states that '[a]ll sentences of the type "deconstruction is X" or "deconstruction is not X" *a priori* miss the point' (Derrida, 1988b: 4). The problem with defining the term stems from the fact that all the predicates which lend themselves to the definition are also deconstructable, including the unity of the word itself ('*It deconstructs it-self*' (4)). Therefore, as soon as we have meaning, it can be deconstructed. In other words, deconstruction takes place whenever there *is* something (Critchley, 1999a: 23). Conversely, if something is not deconstructable, then it is transcendental and, hence, impossible (see sec. 3; chap. 5, sec. 6).

Deconstruction intervenes in our systems of meaning, in order to open these systems to new interpretations. In this regard, Derrida (1988b:4) writes that deconstruction is 'the delimiting of ontology'. Deconstruction represents an attempt to undermine the very stability of our systems of meaning, and thereby shift the limits of our understanding. Deconstruction, therefore, provides us with a *clôtural* reading, which according to Simon Critchley (1999a: 30) 'articulates the ethical interruption of ontological closure, thereby disrupting the text's claims to comprehensive unity and self-understanding'. To conclusively define deconstruction as an analysis, a critique, a method, or even an act or operation (Derrida, 1988b: 3) closes the term off to alternative understandings. This neutralises the force of a disruption or an interruption brought about by deconstruction (see Critchley, 1999a: 20) – hence, Derrida's (1988b: 5) statement: 'What deconstruction is not? everything of course! What is deconstruction? nothing of course!' These definitional difficulties also make it problematic to claim that deconstruction is a postmodern position, because such a claim presupposes that deconstruction can be identified with an existing body of knowledge or movement (albeit a highly fragmented one!)

Conceptualising deconstruction as a type of analytic strategy or method that can be unproblematically applied (as has often been the case in organisation studies[53]) holds three additional dangers (as identified by Jones, 2004: 41): firstly, there is the danger of reducing deconstruction to only a method, thereby negating the epistemological, ontological, ethical, and

[53] In this regard, Jones (2004: 40) mentions the work of Calás (1993), Boje (1998) and Martin (1990).

political aspects of deconstruction; secondly, deconstructing can easily be construed as an activity conducted from outside the text ('a position of safe exteriority, if not objectivity' (41)); and, thirdly, deconstruction might be applied as a method by which to read a text, rather than a manner in which to renegotiate textual limits and relations (also see Jones, 2007: 518; Jones, 2003: 240; Critchley, 1999a: 21-22).

Despite these difficulties, a provisional description of the strategy of deconstruction (which is, of course, also open to deconstruction) will be provided in this chapter. The chapter begins with an analysis of Derrida's understanding of meaning. In this section, the issues of hierarchy, authority, text, and context are examined. The insights gleaned are illustrated at the hand of the example of speech and writing. Once the nature of meaning is adequately explained, the analysis moves on to a discussion of the double movement of deconstruction. Here, the nature of deconstruction (as an intervention or operation) is explained, and once again illustrated at the hand of the example of speech and writing. Attention is also given to Derrida's understanding of the supplement, play, *différance,* and trace. The logic of these 'concepts' (or 'non-concepts') serves to illustrate why deconstruction cannot be reduced to a mere methodology by which to read texts. The way in which these concepts operate in texts is explained at the hand of Derrida's example of the *pharamakon*. In the next section, it is shown why deconstruction – as an operation and an intervention – is always undertaken in the name of the ethical. Derrida's understanding of ethical decision-making is also introduced in this section, and the promise and threat that characterise the ethical moment are expounded upon. The chapter concludes with a brief look at how deconstruction, and a deconstructive ethics, has been received by some in the academic world, specifically within the context of organisation studies and business ethics.

It must be noted that the aim of this chapter is to introduce the reader to Derrida's thoughts. This is deemed necessary in order to prepare for the close reading that will be undertaken in the next chapter, in which the viability of a deconstructive ethics for business ethics will be assessed at the hand of the example of corporate social responsibility. As with the last chapter, this chapter is theoretical in nature, and the implications that a deconstructive ethics holds for business ethics will only be discussed in subsequent chapters. It must also be noted that, although Derrida's understanding of ethics is discussed in this chapter, this discussion is only introductory in nature, as most of the specific implications that his ideas hold for understanding ethics will be presented in the following chapter.

2. Understanding deconstruction

2.1. Authority, hierarchy and (con)text

2.1.1. The significance of deconstructing hierarchies

Deconstruction works from the premise that in order for there to be meaning, reality must be interpreted and ordered. This ordering of reality into conceptual schema creates hierarchies, where certain terms are necessarily privileged over others. The logos or privileged term operates at the expense of the marginal or secondary term, which is often employed to secure the status of the logos. Therefore, as Derrida (1981: 41) explains in 'Positions', in any system of meaning 'we have not a peaceful coexistence of facing terms but a violent hierarchy. One of the terms dominates the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), occupies the commanding position.' The term which is in the commanding position – or in the authoritarian position – can only maintain its status by suppressing the secondary term, and by assimilating any differences into the logos.

It is precisely because of this assimilation of difference that Derrida takes exception with hierarchies and authority, as he explains in *Negotiations*:

> I have, it seems, a quasi-aesthetic aversion to authority and hierarchy… The aesthetic aversion has to do more with the fact that, most often, the most common forms of authority and hierarchy, of power and hegemony, have something in them which is vulgar, insufficiently refined, or insufficiently differentiated: thus my aversion to authority, in this case, is also an aversion to what is still too homogenous, insufficiently refined or differentiated, or else egalitarian (Derrida, 2002a: 20).

However, Derrida is also quick to qualify that we cannot do without hierarchies and authority, as is clear from the following two citations: '… I do not think that there are nonhierarchical structures. I do not think they exist' (21); and '… I am not an enemy of hierarchy in general and of preference nor even of authority' (21). Hierarchies are the means by which we structure reality. In other words, hierarchies are a necessary condition for meaning (see chap. 3, sec. 5.2.2.), but – as stated above – as soon as we have meaning it can be deconstructed. Hierarchies are conceptual constructions, and deconstruction is necessary to guard against the naturalisation of hierarchies. Deconstruction, therefore, serves to destabilise hierarchies, which, in turn, opens up our systems of meaning in ways that allow for more differentiation and qualitative difference (21). For Cooper (1989: 480),

deconstruction, therefore, addresses the 'the logics of *structure* and *process* and their interaction', by showing that 'our traditional ways of thinking are structure-biased and therefore incapable of revealing the nomadic and often paradoxical character of process.'

2.1.2. There is nothing outside (con)text

What makes the task of deconstruction difficult, however, is that we have no bird's eye, from which to deconstruct. To understand this statement from a Derridean perspective, we turn to an oft quoted (and controversially interpreted) passage from *Of Grammatology.* Here Derrida states 'There is no outside text' (Derrida, 1976: 158) ['*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*' (Derrida, 1967: 227)] or 'There is nothing outside of the text' (Derrida, 1976: 163) ['*Il n'y a rien hors du texte'* (Derrida, 1967: 233)]. Critchley (1999a: 25) notes the difference in formulations here: the first citation claims that there is no 'outside-text', whereas the second formulation claims that one cannot move outside textuality – there is nothing outside textuality. Both these formulations reinforce the fact that there is no Archimedean point that is 'out there' or independent of language (Betz, 2009: 334), and one is consequently bound within the limits of textuality (Critchley, 1999a: 26)[54].

Derrida's claim that there is nothing outside the text is not a constructivist claim i.e. a claim that reduces all our experiences of the world to language. Rather, as Schalkwyk (1997: 387) explains, both language and perception are regarded as 'species of the genus representation-in-general', or what Derrida sometimes calls the 'general text', but more often just 'the text'. Derrida, therefore, does not conflate language and the world, but 'insists on the imbrication of language and the world' (387). To say that there is nothing outside the text, is also, therefore, to say that there is nothing outside context, a move which Derrida (1988a: 136) makes explicit in the 'Afterword', in stating that:

> The phrase which for some has become a sort of slogan, in general so badly understood, of deconstruction ("there is nothing outside the text: [*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]), means nothing else: there is nothing outside context. In this form, which says exactly the same thing, the formula would doubtless have been less shocking.

It was noted that stating that there is nothing outside the text, or stating that there is no outside text, is not an argument for the primacy of language, but rather an argument against any Archimedean point – which Derrida designates by the term logocentrism, and which is to be understood as 'the

[54] Also see the arguments on embeddedness in chapter two (sec. 6.3.), and chapter three (sec. 6.2.).

determination of the being of the entity as presence' (Derrida, 1976: 12). Derrida further argues that positioning oneself against logocentrism, means positioning oneself against the history of metaphysics, the history of the West, and the history of Being. In this regard, Derrida writes that '[i]t could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence – *eidos, arche, telos, energia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *aletheia,* transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth' (Derrida, 1978a: 279-280).

Therefore, far from presenting an argument for constructivism (or the primacy of language), Derrida's philosophy is constituted by arguments against logocentrism. Perhaps a possible reason for why critics continue to misunderstand Derrida's statement that 'there is nothing outside the text' is because he develops his most famous argument against logocentrism (in *Of Grammatology*) with reference to the opposition between speech and writing in language.

2.1.3. The example of speech and writing

Traditionally, writing has always been characterised as materiality and exteriority, 'two explicitly excremental epithets'; whereas speech has been understood as the 'diaphanous, diaphonic ideality and interiority of the voice *qui s'entend parler* [who is waiting to speak]' (Krell, 1988: 8). The philosophical voice, which hears and understands itself, is a fully present voice, which represents the 'dream of [a] totalising self-presence, perfectly fulfilled, utterly slaked desire' (9). As such, philosophical discourse has always defined itself against writing, and the threat posed by writing is that it would affect or infect the meaning it is supposed to represent (Culler, 1983: 91). Thus, according to this conception, the ideal would be to contemplate thought directly; and, since this is not possible, we should strive for a language that is as transparent as possible (and, therefore, as free of writing as possible) (91). By analysing the hierarchy in which our understanding of language is structured, Derrida shows how logocentrism – or in this case, phonocentrism as 'the privileging of voice' (92) – denotes a metaphysics of presence, which not only privileges speech before writing, but also:

> the positive before the negative, the pure before the impure, the simple before the complex, the essential before the accidental, the imitated before the imitation, etc. And this is not just *one* metaphysical gesture among others; it is *the* metaphysical exigency, that which has been the most constant, most profound, and most potent (Derrida, 1988c: 93).

In summary, to say that there is nothing outside of (con)text is a way of asserting oneself against 'the Logos, the undeconstructable origin of the meaning of being, the rationality of thought, the absolute interiority of truth' (Lucy, 2004: 71); or, of positioning philosophy inside the text. The question which now arises, is: if there is nothing outside of con(text), how is one supposed to go about opening up texts or destabilising hierarchies? In other words, how does deconstruction take place?

2.2. On deconstructing

The answer to the above question lies in the double movement of deconstruction. Deconstruction works on two fronts: on the one hand, to deconstruct means to concede to one's complicity in the systems of meaning which one seeks to challenge; and, on the other hand, it means to traverse beyond the system. These two movements of deconstruction do not follow chronologically, but take place simultaneously, and, therefore, require a double-thinking on the part of the deconstructionist.

2.2.1. The double movement of deconstruction

The first movement of deconstruction, demands that one engages with the dominant interpretation of a text or context. In order for one to successfully engage with a text, one must be competent at reading and writing so that 'the dominant interpretation of a text can be reconstructed as a necessary and indispensible layer or moment of reading' (Critchley, 1999a: 24). If this were not possible, 'one could indeed say just anything at all' (Derrida, 1976: 158), which is a strategy that Derrida explicitly renounces, in stating that '…I have never accepted saying, or being encouraged to say, just anything at all' (158)[55].

It might seem strange that deconstruction – as a strategy employed against traditional structures of meaning – places such a significant emphasis on the dominant understanding of texts, but Derrida (1978a: 280) notes that all attempts at destructive discourses are trapped within a circle (and here he cites the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics; the Freudian critique of self-presence; and, the

55 This argument not only applies to reading certain texts (although Derrida was a greater reader of texts, including the texts of Husserl, Hegel, Heidegger, Freud, Nietzsche and Saussure), but also of contexts. In this regard, Derrida (1999: 67) writes:

> I would assume that political, ethical and juridical responsibility requires a task of infinite close reading. I believe this to be the condition of political responsibility: politicians should read. Now to read does not mean to spend nights in the library; to read events, to analyse the situation, to criticize the media, to listen to the rhetoric of demagogues, that's close reading, and it is required more today than ever. So I would urge politicians and citizens to practice close reading in this new sense, and not simply to stay in the library.

Heideggerean destruction of metaphysics, of onto-theology, and of the determination of Being as presence). This circle can be described as a performative contradiction, in which the destruction of the history of metaphysics can only be undertaken on the basis of this very history (see chap. 2, sec. 6.2.). In this regard, Derrida (280) writes:

> There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to this history: we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest[56].

However, despite these difficulties, a deconstructive reading 'cannot simply be that of commentary nor that of interpretation' (Derrida, 1973a: 88). As stated before, to deconstruct means to destablise the dominant interpretation, whilst simultaneously engaging with this interpretation (Critchley, 1999a: 26). The destabilisation of hierarchies should not be seen as a negative, or destructive enterprise. Rather, deconstruction (and destabilisation) is required for progress, for 'what remains to be thought beyond the constructivist or destructionist schema' (Derrida, 1988a: 147).

The deconstructionist, therefore, takes the status quo seriously and works from within the existing system of meaning, in order to break it open to new interpretations. In the words of Derrida, deconstruction '*interven[es]* in the field of oppositions it criticizes' (Derrida, 1988d: 21). This is done so as to reveal the text's blind spot (or the repression and marginalisation of difference). This operation typically characterises the second movement of deconstruction (which, to reiterate, takes place alongside the first movement). In showing how that which is relegated to the margins of the dominant discourse or schema is needed to maintain the privileged status of the logos, the text starts to undo itself, thereby creating an opening for a new interpretation or way of being.

2.2.2. Revisiting the example of speech and writing

In returning to the example of language, Derrida (1976) notes that if writing has always threatened the purity of speech, then the relationship between speech and writing is more complex than is portrayed in the traditional hierarchical schema, which gives precedence to speech over writing (Culler, 1983: 101). In order to show how the hierarchical opposition between speech and writing

[56] In this regard, it is useful to recall Whitehead's (1979: 39) famous claim that the 'safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.'

can be reversed, Derrida begins his deconstruction with reference to the Saussurian understanding of language as a system of differences. Following Saussure (1960), Derrida argues that there is no exact or literal meaning that is inherent to language – rather, all we have is a dynamic system of differences, where every event or every speech act is itself made possible by prior structures (Culler, 1983: 95). In other words, Derrida appropriates the Saussurian insight that we do not have a substantive understanding of words or concepts; rather, our understanding of language is premised on how words and concepts *differ* from one another.

The notion of the sign, as a differential unit, is best illustrated in the written form, where, for example, we recognise the letter 'm' as distinct from the other letters in the alphabet, which allows us to form a relational understanding of the letter 'm' (101). In explaining the differential nature of speech, Saussure (1960: 119) writes: 'Since an identical state of affairs is observable in writing, another system of signs, we shall use writing to draw some comparisons that will clarify the whole issue.'

Hence, as Jonathan Culler (1983: 101) explains, we see that writing, which, for Saussure, should 'not be the object of linguistic enquiry, turns out to be the best illustration of the nature of linguistic units.' In this regard, Derrida (1976: 44) states:

> If 'writing' means inscription and especially the durable instituting of signs (and this is the only irreducible kernel of the concept of writing), then writing in general covers the entire domain of linguistic signs… The very idea of institution, hence of the arbitrariness of the sign, is unthinkable prior to or outside the horizon of writing.

In the second movement of deconstruction, the hierarchy of language is destabilised through reversing or overturning (Cooper, 1989: 483) the binary opposition between speech and writing. This, in turn, gives us a new concept of writing, as a generalised writing (or arche-writing), 'which is both the condition of speech and writing in the narrow sense' (Culler, 1983: 102); or, which has, as its subspecies, 'a vocal writing and a graphic writing' (101). However, one must be careful not to immediately institute writing as the dominant term, as this won't result in a destabilisation of hierarchy, but rather in the reinstutionalisation of another rigid structure. To avoid this, one must also be sensitive to the process of displacement or metaphorisation (Cooper, 1989: 483) of meaning that takes place in deconstruction.

Derrida warns that '[d]econstruction cannot be restricted or immediately pass to neutralization' (Derrida, 1988d: 21). Instead, just as Derrida insists on the imbrication of language and the world; so too, the example of arche-writing points to the imbrication of speech and writing. In other words, the individual terms inhabit each other (Cooper, 1989: 483), or give way 'to a process where opposites merge in a constant *undecidable* exchange of attributes' (Norris, 1987: 35). This process guards against the naturalisation of hierarchies. In order to explain what is meant by the constant displacement of meaning, it is useful to turn to Derrida's discussion of the supplement, play, *différance*, and trace, which is well-explained by the example of the *pharmakon* in Plato.

2.3. The logic of the supplement and the notion of *différance*

2.3.1. A supplementary complication

Derrida (1988a: 117) reminds us in the 'Afterword' that the oppositional logic of hierarchies is necessary for us to generate concepts and meaning (we can have no non-hierarchical structures). However, Derrida also warns that 'the ideal purity of the distinctions proposed… is inaccessible' (117) and that 'its practice would necessitate excluding certain essential traits of what it claims to explain or describe – and yet cannot integrate into the "general theory."' As such, 'all conceptual production appeals to idealization' (117). For this reason, deconstruction (as the destabilisation of hierarchies) is necessary to provide:

> a supplementary complication that calls for other concepts, for other thoughts beyond the concept and another form of "general theory," or rather another discourse, another "logic" that accounts for the impossibility of concluding such a "general theory" (117).

To understand what Derrida means by a supplementary complication, we turn to his reading of Rossouw in *Of Grammatology*. Derrida (1976: 163) writes that the word *supplément* is the 'blind spot' in Rossouw's texts, in that he employs the word without accounting for its logic (Critchley, 1999a: 23). Rossouw uses the term supplement to describe the relationship between speech and writing: writing is a technique which is foreign to speech, and which is, therefore, an add-on. However, writing can only function as a supplement to speech, if speech is not 'a self-sufficient, natural plenitude' (Culler, 1983: 103). Derrida (1976: 103), therefore, argues that writing is a derivative to speech 'only on one condition: that the 'original,' 'natural' etc. language never existed, was never intact or untouched by writing, that it has itself always been a writing', an arche-writing.

The work of the supplement is, therefore, to substitute for an absence or lack in the logos, but as Derrida (1978a: 289) notes in his discussion on supplementarity in the work of Levi-Strauss (1966), such an absence or lack is not something that we can recover through rigorous work, but is rather inherent to the nature of concepts: 'One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center's place in its absence – this sign occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*' (Derrida, 1978a: 289). Absence, therefore, defines the very heart of the logos, which must be supplemented.

2.3.2. Play, différance, and the logic of the trace

The logic of supplementarity is always at play in our concepts. All systems of meaning can be conceptualised on a continuum between no centre (absolute free play) and a fixed centre (absolute structure). The concept of play (*jeu*) is a term employed by Derrida to denote the fact that no completeness or totalisation is possible. Derrida (1978a: 289) notes that, in the classical style, totalisation refers to a subject or finite richness which cannot be empirically mastered, simply because the subject matter lends itself to a conceptual richness that cannot be captured in a finite discourse. However, for Derrida, the impossibility of totalisation is not due to empirical limitations, but rather due to the nature of the subject or field:

> The field is in effect that of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions (289).

Derrida (290) goes on to describe the function and nature of play: 'Play is the disruption of presence' and is 'always the play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence.' This description of play is remarkably similar to Derrida description of *différance*, which he characterises as:

> a structure and a movement that cannot be conceived on the basis of the opposition presence/absence. *Différance* is the systematic play of differences, of traces of differences, of the spacing [*espacement*] by which elements relate to one another. This spacing is the production, simultaneously active and passive (the *a* of *différance* indicates this indecision as regards activity and passivity, that which cannot be governed and organized by that

> opposition), of intervals without which the "full" terms could not signify, could not function (Derrida, 1981b: 27).

In French, the word for 'difference' is *différence*; however, the difference between *différence* (with an 'e') and *différance* (with an 'a') is inaudible. In other words, the identity of *différance* only exists in writing (Lucy, 2004: 25). *Différance* as 'the systematic play of differences' not only refers to the space between 'a' and 'e' (the spacing of difference), but also to the necessity of spacing, as the means by which elements are related to one another (spacing as difference). Whereas the 'spacing of difference' is a passive spacing, 'spacing as difference' constitutes an active movement in time (26). *Différance* is, therefore, both a spatial and a temporal concept, where the meaning of an element constantly differs (*differ)* from the meaning of other elements, but where meaning and identity are also constantly deferred (*différer*). This means that identity is constituted by relational difference (Saussure's insight), but also that – *because* identity is constituted by difference – an element's ''own' constitution as an autonomous or fully complete entity' is always deferred (27). Derrida (1982: 13) writes that '[i]t is because of *différance* that the movement of signification is possible', which means that '*[d]ifférance* [like play] is neither a word nor a concept' (Derrida, 1973b: 130) but rather the condition of possibility for conceptuality and words as such (Critchley, 1999a: 37).

Whereas binary and logocentric schemas emphasise the difference between opposing terms, deconstruction, supplementarity, play and *différance*, show how our signifying systems are constituted by a difference that both separates and joins. In so doing, attention is drawn to 'a rupture within metaphysics, a pattern of incongruities where the metaphysical rubs up against the non-metaphysical, that it is deconstruction's job to juxtapose as best as it can' (Reynolds, 2005). Derrida marks this rupture by employing the term 'trace', which Spivak characterises as 'the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience' (preface to *Of Grammatology,* Derrida, 1976: xvii). The trace never appears as such (Derrida, 1976: 65) as it has 'no place, for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace' (Derrida, 1973b: 156). However, according to Reynolds (2005), a deconstructive intervention can mime the logic of the trace in a text, and bring it to the fore. This is necessary in order to prevent metaphysical closure; or, in order to prevent the naturalisation of hierarchies – which, as Derrida points out, is an important task, because 'one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it' (Derrida, 1976, 24).

In layman's terms, the logic of play, *différance,* and the trace reveal how the meaning of our concepts are always-already contaminated by the meaning of other concepts. This serves to undermine the rigidity of our conceptual distinctions. In order to illustrate the nature of the trace, as well as the temporal or processual nature of *différance,* we turn to the example of the *pharmakon*.

2.4. An example and a summary

2.4.1. Plato's pharmacy

In the essay entitled 'Plato's pharmacy' (2004a), Derrida deconstructs several texts by Plato, including *Phaedrus*, in order to reveal the interconnections between *pharmakon* and *pharmakeus,* and the notable absence of the word *pharmakos.*

The word *pharmakon* means both remedy/cure and poison. In *Phaedrus*, Plato (1997) uses the term to describe writing: writing is a supplement – the artificial add-on which both poisons and cures. In this text, Plato employs the term in a fashion, which suggests that the meaning of the term (as either remedy or poison) is clear (Culler, 1983: 142). However, what Derrida shows in 'Plato's pharmacy' is that the character of the *pharmakon* is indeterminate and ambivalent. According to Derrida (2004a: 13), the *pharmakon* 'constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross into the other'. In other words, one can never be entirely sure whether *pharmakon* refers to a poison or a cure, since traces of each meaning pervades the other. Cooper (1989: 489) elaborates on Derrida's understanding of the *pharmakon*, by writing that the two meanings of pharmakon 'actively *defer* each other, the deferred term being postponed for the present, waiting for an opportunity to flow back to the medium from which it was severed.' The *pharmakon* is, therefore, '(the production of) difference. It is the difference of difference' (Derrida, 2004a: 130).

The logic of the *pharmakon* infects speech and writing, by showing how the oppositional difference between these terms is unsustainable; or, by showing how the play of difference always precedes an oppositional difference. In this regard, Derrida (113) writes:

> Plato maintains *both* the exteriority of writing *and* its power of maleficent penetration, its ability to affect and infect what lies deepest inside. The *pharmakon* is that dangerous supplement that breaks into the very thing that would have liked to do without it yet lets

> itself *at once* be breached, roughed up, fulfilled, and replaced, completed by the very trace through which the present increases itself in the act of disappearing.

Culler (1983: 143) writes that 'this role of the *pharmakon* as a condition of difference is further confirmed by the link with *pharmakos*, "scapegoat".' Just as Socrates wished to exclude the poison of writing from the purity of speech, so too the exclusion of the scapegoat from the city is meant to represent the casting out of evil (Derrida, 2004a: 133). In fact, the Greeks held a special purification and expiatory ceremony on the sixth day of the Thargelia (135) (an Athenian festival in honour of Apollo and Artemis), in which two *pharmakoi* were chosen to die. However, Derrida (133) makes the significant point that the evil of the *pharmakos* can only be defined from within the city walls, even though the aim is its 'exclusion out of the body (and out) of the city'. This leads him to conclude that:

> The ceremony of the *pharmakos* is, thus played out on the boundary line between the inside and the outside, which it has as its function ceaselessly to trace and retrace. *Intra muros/extra muros.* The origin of difference and division, the *pharmakos* represents evil both introjected and projected (134).

The word *pharmakos* is also a synonym for *pharmakeus,* which means 'wizard, magician, poisoner' (133). In Plato's dialogues, Socrates is often described as a *pharmakeus* – as a sorcerer – whose philosophy represents a *pharmakon*; a medicine or cure in the form of '[t]he eidos, truth, law, the episteme, dialectics [and] philosophy' (127). However, Socrates' *pharmakon* 'must be opposed to the *pharmakon* of the Sophists and to the bewitching fear of death' (127). As such, the Sophists are also portrayed as *pharmakeia,* but instead of healing, these witches prescribe poisonous sophistry! Therefore, as Derrida (127) notes, Plato pits '*pharmakeus* against *pharmakeus*, *pharamkon* against *pharmakon*.'

Ironically, however, Socrates also becomes Athens's most famous scapegoat, and is eventually killed by ingesting poison. What is even more remarkable is that the date designated for the ceremony of the *pharmakos* (namely, the sixth day of the Thargelia) marks 'the day of the birth of him whose death – and not only because a *pharmakon* was its direct cause – resembles that of a *pharmakos* from the inside: Socrates' (135). Today, we can recall this incident due to its inscription in writing, which, to Socrates, represented 'a harmful drug [and] a philter of forgetfulness' (129) i.e. the most dangerous *pharmakon* of all!

The interplay of the words *pharmakon-pharmakos-pharmakeus* illustrates the play of meaning and of *différance*. In this regard, Derrida (128) notes that 'the essence of the *pharmakon* lies in the way in which, having no stable essence, no 'proper' characteristics, it is not, in any sense (metaphysical, physical, chemical, alchemical) of the word, a substance.' There is no sure way of keeping the poison and the cure, the magician and sorcerer, speech and writing, or logic and rhetoric apart. All these concepts bear the mark of the trace: their meanings are established by an endless chain of supplements, by the play of competing interpretations, and by relations and deferrals that are constantly at work.

2.4.2. Deconstruction is hymeneal

In summary, we can say that all meaning is characterised by the double movement, which like the hymen – i.e. that fold of tissue that covers the jewel box of virginity – simultaneously presents the membrane of meaning, and signifies a penetration of that membrane and meaning. The hymen does not belong to the inside or to the outside: it is the 'in-between'; it signifies the space of the partition, or the spatio-temporal interval between 'the presence of this' and 'the presence of that'. The hymen serves to deontlogise the centre, by ontologising the margin (between inside and outside), and is thus the movement of work which joins and separates, connects and divides (see Derrida, 2004b: 222-226; Culler, 1983: 144-145).

With regard to the first movement, deconstruction is hymeneal in the sense that, on the one hand, it marks the place of difference. As with a traditional reading which necessitates engagement with the dominant interpretation of texts, the hymen marks the acceptance of the distinctions between the surface features of a discourse and the underlying logic; between the empirical features of language and thought itself; and, between the inside of the system and the outside of the system (Culler, 1983: 146).

These distinctions become prevalent in the second movement[57] of deconstruction, where attention is drawn to the text's blind spots, including the metaphors, apparently marginal features of the text, and the different meanings of the words in the text. This is done in order to reveal the inherent paradoxical logic of texts, and to set forth a reversal of the dominant interpretation. In this regard, Culler (146) writes: 'Derrida is not playing with words, he is betting with words, employing them

[57] Culler (1983: 146) refers to the first and second movement as the right-handed and left-handed operations of deconstruction. This classification works well, as – unlike the chronology implied in the terms 'first' and 'second' – the terms 'left' and 'right' draw attention to the simultaneous nature of the task at hand.

strategically with an eye on larger stakes.' However, merely reversing the dominant interpretation is not enough: a displacement of meaning must also take place.

Deconstruction is hymeneal in that it destabilises concepts. By teasing out textual and linguistic configurations (as in 'Plato's pharmacy'), the deconstructionist puts into question the possibility of distinguishing with surety between the oppositional concepts and operations that govern texts. In this regard, it is useful to bear in mind that the hymen is etymologically related to sewing, weaving, or spinning. Meanings are intertwined: there is always a trace of alterity or difference that pervades our concepts. As such, the hymen is the space of difference itself, or difference within concepts – which also serves to prevent concepts from closing in upon themselves.

3. Towards a deconstructive ethics

3.1. Deconstruction and ethical testimony

In recent years, there has been much discussion regarding what appears to be an 'ethical turn' in Derrida's later works (Jones, 2003: 224). Whereas some see the ethical turn as constituting a break with the themes that dominate his earlier works, others maintain that the more explicit focus on ethics 'is nothing but a clarification or extension of themes ever present in deconstruction' (224). During the interview, 'Hospitality, justice and responsibility: a dialogue with Jacques Derrida' (1999: 80), Derrida is asked a question regarding the continuity in his thinking, as the questioner is unconvinced that there is indeed something like a '*Kehre* or Heideggerean turning' in his thought. In response to this question, Derrida (81) states 'I am grateful that you don't want to cut me in two; I do wish to be cut, but in more that two places!' Derrida wrote on many themes and published extensively during his lifetime, and, as such, one should be weary of identifying an explicit turn in his work. Despite his sheer output, one can provide a stronger reason against an explicit ethical turn in his work, namely that Derrida has been writing on ethics (even if it is not the only thing he has been writing on), since coining the term deconstruction.

During the above-mentioned interview, Derrida is asked whether there is 'a logic of ethical testimony at work in deconstruction?' To this he answers:

> Yes, it is absolutely central to it. Testimony, which implies faith or promise, governs the entire social space. I would say that theoretical knowledge is circumscribed within this testimonial

> space. It is only by reference to the possibility of testimony that deconstruction can begin to ask questions concerning knowledge and meaning (82).

Ethical testimony is the impetus for deconstruction. Without the promise of accounting for that which is excluded from our systems of meaning, or without deconstructing in the name of ethics or the Other, deconstruction would be an endless and pointless exercise. Indeed, it is this transcendental promise that safeguards deconstruction against empiricism or relativism. In this regard, Derrida (2002b: 367) asks: 'Is it empiricist or relativist to seriously take into account what arrives – differences of every order, beginning with the differences of contexts?' Deconstruction, as a project aimed at safeguarding difference, is, therefore, through-and-through an ethical enterprise. At this juncture it should also be quite clear why deconstruction is compatible with the critical enterprise: deconstruction provides us with a 'mechanism' for continually questioning and exploring our knowledge claims and beliefs. Deconstruction, therefore, draws attention to, and facilitates, the important task of imaging a better future, and thereby leads to modifications and transformations of our views on reality.

3.2. Deconstruction as promise and threat

This idea of a transcendental promise sits uncomfortable with an otherwise radically immanent project, targeted against metaphysics itself. However, as will be explained in more detail in the next chapter (secs 5 & 6), the ethical moment (like the just moment) needs to take place beyond the calculable programme (i.e. beyond the possibility of deconstruction, and, therefore, beyond meaning).

For now, it is useful to return to the insights presented in section 6 of chapter two in order to explain the idea of a transcendental promise. In this section, it was argued that substantive ethical theories – although helpful in providing us with the means to think about ethical problems – cannot provide us with blueprints, which prescribe the 'correct' course of action. Rather, ethical decision-making is a highly contextual practice. The ethical decision-maker must grapple with competing demands and interpretations, and must struggle with the insolvable *impasse* that characterise the moment of decision-making. Rationality and calculation cannot resolve the *aporia*, yet a decision must be taken. The deconstructionist grapples with a similar paradox: on the one hand, we cannot totally renounce our systems of meaning (we need rational tools and we need to calculate); but, on the other hand, it is exactly these tools and systems (including the ethics of language) that must be challenged, if we wish to act justly. This ties in with the point that – because our models of reality

are necessarily partial and incomplete (i.e. our models cannot fully account for the complexity of phenomena) – our descriptions of phenomena are defined by an inevitable normativity.

There is no way out of this ethical complexity – to plot the trajectory of an ethical decision is not only to ignore the complexity, but also to exclude anything that may reasonably be called a just decision. The only place in which a just decision can find its expression is in the very moment of the decision, which is always a singular event. After the decision is taken and the action assumed, the ethical moment is transformed into something that can be defined, justified, and criticised. In other words, the transcendental promise is ruined because the logic of the event is destroyed, assimilated into a generalised hierarchy of meaning that transforms ethics and justice into codes and law, and that is once again open to deconstruction. The ethical task must, therefore, take place anew every time a decision is made. Again, this point reinforces the importance of critique, and in this context, it is especially helpful to recall Preiser and Cilliers' (2010) point that it is only through being critical of our own positions that we can make our value judgements explicit, and avoid claiming a false sense of objectivity.

Deconstruction, as the means by which to articulate the ethical interruption of ontological closure, therefore, operates in service of the singularity of the event. In other words, Derrida's entire body of philosophy serves as a constant reminder of the necessity of remaining open to the Other, who cannot be assimilated into our systems of meaning; but who, nevertheless, demands our consideration. In this regard, Derrida (2002b: 364) writes that '[t]he deconstruction of logocentricism, of linguisticism, of economism... etc., as well as the affirmation of the impossible are always put forward *in the name of the real,* of the irreducible reality of the real'. Derrida (264) warns that it is important not to think about the real as an 'attribute of the objective, present, perceptible or intelligible *thing (res)*'. Rather, for him, the real constitutes the transcendental moment, also understood as a promise, or 'as the coming or event of the other, where the other resists all reappropriation, be it ana-onto-phenomenological appropriation' (367). The 'real' is, therefore, a concept that designates the (im)possibility of the ethical moment.

Although deconstruction is undertaken in the name of the real, deconstruction – like negotiation – is also the very place of threat: 'one must [*il faut*] with vigilance venture as far as possible into what appears threatening and at the same time maintain a minimum of security – and also an internal security not to be carried away by this threat' (Derrida, 2002a: 16-17). This threat is constituted by the fact that, in acting justly, we must renounce our systems of meaning, including consciousness, presence, and even language, even though we cannot do without these concepts. We must face the

uncertainty that results from renouncing (as far as possible) our existing systems of meaning, without adopting a nihilistic position.

The nature of this argument becomes clearer if we consider the following remarks on forgiveness, which – like justice, hospitality and gift-giving – has the same structure as ethical decision-making. Derrida (2002b: 351) writes that true forgiveness cannot stem from duty: 'One forgives, if one forgives beyond any categorical imperative, beyond debt and obligation.' In other words, forgiveness must be unconditional. It must disavow the tradition of repentance, economic exchange, and identification, even though we can only think about forgiveness within this tradition. Derrida provides us with the following comments regarding this impossible situation:

> What would it mean to "inherit" a tradition under these conditions, from the moment one thinks on the basis of this tradition, in its name, certainly, but precisely *against it in its name*, against the very thing that tradition believed had to be saved to survive while losing itself? Again the possibility of the impossible: a legacy would only be possible where it becomes impossible. This is one of the possible definitions of deconstruction – precisely as legacy... deconstruction might perhaps be "the experience of the impossible" (352).

4. Derrida's reception in the academic world and in business ethics

4.1. Deconstruction as a critical ethics

From the above we see that deconstruction carries both a threat and a promise – and that both are necessary for ethical testimony. However, Derrida's circumscriptions of deconstruction, and of ethics as an experience of the impossible, have also sparked much criticism. Indeed, one need only take note of the critical obituaries written in the popular press after his death (Kandell, 2004; Mendez-Opale, 2004), or the vehement protests voiced by a number of analytic philosophers at Cambridge, who tried to stop the university from awarding Derrida an honourary degree (Smith, 2005: 4-6), in order to get a feel for the type of reactions that Derrida's deconstructive philosophy elicits. The following example taken from an article by Stephens (1994), serves to illustrate the malicious nature of these attacks. In this article, Roger Kimball, a conservative critic and author of *Tenured Radicals* (2008), is quoted as saying: 'Derrida's influence has been disastrous... He has helped foster a sort of anaemic nihilism, which has given imprimaturs to squads of imitators who no longer feel that what they are engaged in is a search for truth, who would find that notion risible.'

Whilst some of his ardent followers have, no doubt, missed the point of deconstruction, it would be unfair to equate Derrida's project with nihilism.

All too often, deconstruction is construed as a negative ethics, intent on destroying rather than building-up. Such criticism confuses a critical ethics with a negative ethics, and is mostly propagated by those who wish to perpetuate the dream of a categorically-binding ethics. Derrida certainly aims to challenge conventional understandings of ethics, and in this sense he is critical of the Western tradition of philosophical thought. However, his criticisms are not intended to steer us towards the abyss of nothingness, but towards assuming a deeper responsibility for our decisions and actions. This also means foregoing the dream of a categorically-binding ethical framework; and, furthermore, necessitates engagement with the undecidable nature of ethical decision-making.

To elaborate: a deconstructive ethics necessitates that we turn away from the 'dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile' (Derrida, 1978a: 292). In other words, we need to turn away from moral 'recipes' that claim to lead us to the heart of ethics, and instead examine the margins, in an attempt to account for that which is excluded from these moral recipes. We cannot get to these exclusions through only applying rational rules and principles. Although necessary, logic needs to be supplemented by imagination and creativity, and the ethical agent must assume an attitude of openness towards risk.

When we make an ethical decision we take a risk, because the product of our deliberations and actions can never be determined in advance, even though we are infinitely responsible for the consequences of our decisions. Derrida (293) concedes that this is a daunting prospect; so daunting, in fact, that we tend to avert our eyes 'when faced by the as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offering, only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity.' To reiterate: the risk that we take has to do with the fact that the product of our ethical deliberations is both a baby and a monster, or the unknown for which we have not accounted in our deliberations.

For some, the deconstructionist perspective presents a threat that is too large, and a promise that is too elusive. This interpretation has often gives rise to criticism. In this regard, Derrida (1988a:140) states: 'I have come to understand that, *sometimes, certain* bitter and compulsive enemies of deconstruction stand in a more vital relationship, even if not theorized, to what is in effect at stake in it than do *certain* avowed "deconstructionists.' It is, ironically, precisely this recognition of what

is at stake that may lead to the perpetuation of the standard normative tale, in fields such as business ethics. From the viewpoint of a deconstructive ethics, it is no longer possible to distinguish with certainty between good and bad, right and wrong, and what deserves respect and what does not. Taking these insights seriously, therefore, poses a big challenge to the manner in which ethics is understood, practiced, and taught in business.

4.2. Derrida, deconstruction, and business ethics

Despite the controversy unleashed by Derrida's insights, various authors have, since the early 1980s, sought to incorporate Derrida's ideas in the field of organisation studies[58]. A perfunctory glance at the organisation literature seems to suggest that, although popular in the 1980s and 1990s, Derrida's reception in the field has been short-lived, as few organisational theorists continue to work with Derridean ideas. This is because it is generally believed that we have moved past postmodernism (and, therefore, past Derrida). Furthermore, in terms of the extant literature, we see that, whereas some of the studies constitute a more careful reading of Derridean philosophy (Cooper, 1989); others show a loose appropriation of Derrida's insights in a manner that conforms to the author's intentions (Boje, 1998).

In comparison to organisation studies, Derrida has not enjoyed much of a reception in business ethics. However, contrary to developments in organisation studies, we see that the incorporation of Derridean philosophy in business ethics has been more recent (see Jones 2007, 2004, 2003; Jones, Parker and ten Bos, 2005; Weitzner, 2007; MacKenzie, 2000; Willmott, 1998). Indeed, a special issue of *Business Ethics: a European Review* (vol. 19; issue 3) on the relation between Derrida, business and ethics appeared in July 2010, following a conference held in 2008 on 'Derrida and Business Ethics'.

However, as in organisation studies (and philosophy in general), Derrida's reception in business ethics has been mixed. In this regard, it is not surprising that two recent articles on the importance of Derrida for business ethics (by Weitzner (2007) and Jones (2007)) have met with almost instantaneous critique and dismissal (by Weiss (2007) and De George (2008) respectively). Although the criticisms are not lodged against Derrida as such, but rather against the usefulness of the interpretations given of Derrida, it is, nevertheless, clear that both Weis and De George are

[58] See Jones (2004: 34-35) for a full list of authors working in the field of organisation studies who have utilised Derridean ideas in their considerations of various organisational themes.

sceptical of the purported value that Derrida can bring to the boardroom. De George (85) explicitly conveys this sentiment in the conclusion of his article, in stating that:

> The onus is on Jones and other followers of Derrida to show how, by using 'the categories made available in the writings of Jacques Derrida' (Jones 2007), those in CSR and business ethics can do, and do more effectively, what they want to do and what they cannot do without these categories.

Given the above analysis of a deconstructive ethics, it is not surprising that many business ethicists (who concern themselves with legitimising the ethics of business, with providing ethical criteria against which organisations can measure their ethical success, or with engaging in business ethics management practices) would react with hostility to an ethics which speaks of deconstruction, supplement, play, trace, and *différance*.

As already mentioned, one reason for such hostility is that many business ethicists (in espousing codes, rules, norms, and procedures) wish to offer comfort in the name of business ethics, by offering tools to 'solve' moral dilemmas. Against this, a deconstructive ethics has as its goal the task of calling into question 'the self-satisfying rules, excuses and alibis that *produce* a reassuring sense of comfort' (Jones, 2003: 237; 238).

Yet, there is a second reason for why many business ethicists are weary of bringing Derrida to business ethics, namely: the problem of application. Indeed, as Jones (234) argues, Derrida's insights cannot be assimilated into a code, which can then be applied. In this regard, 'the idea that Derrida could or would need to be applied seems foreign to his thought' (234); and, more importantly, if deconstruction was reduced to a methodology, or Derridean insights taken up in a formula, 'it would tend to efface the very idea of responsibility' (234). This latter reason presents a pitfall to be avoided, and the way in which several business ethicists have tended to circumvent this problem, is by speaking 'in vague generalities about 'Derridean ethics' and 'poststructuralism' rather than paying attention to Derrida's works and the specific arguments he makes there' (225). These vague generalities have indeed limited the appeal and usefulness of incorporating Derrida's insights into business ethics. In the next chapter, the possibility of productively applying a deconstructive ethics to business ethics problems will be investigated in more detail.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, some of Derrida's ideas were introduced in explaining deconstruction. Most notably, Derrida's understanding of meaning as a textual and contextual phenomenon was elaborated upon. It was shown that, meaning is always grounded in a context. This context is defined by both structure and play. In other words, on the one hand, meaning is the product of hierarchy, authority, and structure. On the other hand, however, meaning can never be fixed, due to the logic of supplementarity, *différance,* and the trace that is always at play in our systems of meaning. Since meaning cannot be fixed, we should guard against the naturalisation of hierarchies. In this sense, the task of deconstruction – as an intervention – is to open up our systems of meaning to differences that have not been accounted for. Herein lies the ethics of deconstruction. What should also be clear from this analysis is that deconstruction addresses the dual challenges of text and context. Normative categories are employed, but these categories are inseparable from the contexts in which they derive their meaning. Not only does this analysis clearly illustrate the dissolution of fixed normative and descriptive categories, but also draws attention to the fact that – in the absence of objective meta-positions – deconstruction is a continual process.

Deconstruction is always undertaken anew in an attempt to do justice to the irreducibility of the singular Other. The ethical moment manifests in the event, which cannot be prepared for in advance. The moment of the event, however, not only carries within it the promise of justice, but also a threat to internal security, or an abandonment of our preconceptions and prejudices, even if this proves impossible (hence, Derrida's characterisation of ethics as an experience of the impossible). Not only is the ethical experience characterised by this impossibility, but making decisions and undertaking actions also implies a necessary measure of risk. This is because we have to take responsibility for the consequences of our decisions and actions, even though we cannot predict them in advance.

This characterisation has led many to believe that deconstruction presents us with a negative ethics. It this chapter, it has been argued that these interpretations misconstrue the point of deconstruction – deconstruction is critical, not negative, and, moreover, urges us to assume greater responsibility, not abandon our responsibilities. Nevertheless, this negative characterisation of deconstruction is rife in the academic world, and the field of business ethics is no exception. Adding to the problem is the fact that deconstruction does not present us with a substantive theory, nor does the term allow for a fixed definition. These problems limit the appeal of applying Derrida's ideas in the field of business ethics, and – as stated in the previous section – many of the attempts to outline a 'Derridean ethics'

have amounted to vague generalities, or have reduced Derrida's work to a couple of general formulae.

In order to avoid these pitfalls, the following chapter will not present an outline for a 'Derridean ethics'. Rather, the strategy that will be followed in this chapter is to pay careful attention to Derrida's work and arguments, in an attempt to engage with some of the specific ways in which he has been appropriated and criticised in business ethics. This is done in order to show how the categories made available by Derrida, do, indeed, allow for a new understanding of business ethics.

As such, section 3 (in which a deconstructive ethics was presented), and section 4 (in which an overview of Derrida's reception in the academic, and business ethics, world was given) should be read as a broad introduction to the following chapter. In chapter five, the normative implications of a deconstructive ethics are teased out at the hand of a specific business ethics example, namely the way in which corporate social responsibility should be understood. The discussion will be supplemented with insights gleaned from the complexity literature; and, through the analysis, it will become clear why deconstruction is an example of a complex ethics.

Chapter 5:
Derrida and the Case for Corporate Social Responsibility

1. Introduction

This chapter presents a close reading of two business ethics articles. The purpose of the close reading is to engage with the application of Derrida's ideas to business ethics. The two readings are Richard De George's (2008) article, entitled 'An American perspective on corporate social responsibility and the tenuous relevance of Jacques Derrida'; and Campbell Jones's (2007) article, entitled 'Friedman with Derrida'. De George's article constitutes a response to, and a critique of Jones's article. The primary focus of the chapter will be on De George's critique. Jones's article will be read through this critique, and various readings of, and by, Derrida will be grafted onto the text. This is done in order to respond to De George's criticism of Jones and Derrida, and to present an argument for the timely relevance of Derrida in business ethics.

The reasons for engaging with De George's and Jones' texts specifically are threefold: firstly, Jones, and particularly De George have substantial reputations in the field of business ethics. Moreover, Jones is one of the few established business ethicists working on business ethics and postmodernism. In this context, his texts on Derrida warrant specific mention (see Jones 2007, 2004, 2003). Given the above, one can argue that both the articles to be analysed in this chapter present 'anchor points' in the debate regarding the viability of Derrida for business ethics. Secondly, the specific focus of both authors' texts is on corporate social responsibility (CSR), which is a central topic in business ethics, and, therefore, a good place to start when investigating the purported value of Derrida's thoughts for business ethics. Thirdly, De George's account of CSR (and business ethics in general) represents a stance which, although common, is at odds with a Derridean notion of ethics and responsibility. As such, the stark juxtaposition between De George and Derrida/Jones helps to show why the categories made available in the writings of Derrida, do indeed bring something new to the table, specifically with regard to CSR.

With regard to this third point, one can summarise the central difference between De George's and Derrida's position as follows: whereas De George presents an approach that stresses the *commonalities* in our human experiences, Derrida's approach urges us to account for the *differences* that characterise ways of being in the world. Although De George (2008: 74) starts his article by drawing a distinction between how corporations are viewed in Europe versus North America, and

although he – at points in the argument – stresses contextual and conceptual differences that inform our understanding of business ethics themes, his overall position, nevertheless, grounds morality in human conventions and common experiences (78). De George's position is only tenable if we accept the rigid distinction between the normative and the descriptive categories, since this is the only way in which it makes sense to speak of our common morality (as necessarily corresponding to the transcendental ideal), whilst simultaneously allowing for conceptual (descriptive) differences. Over and against this, a Derridean approach is one that provides a challenge to our systems of meaning (as was explained in chapter four). In drawing attention to the normative implications generated by our conceptual schema, Derrida attempts to both open up our systems of meaning to those who resist assimilation into the logos, and to prevent these systems from becoming naturalised under the banner of our 'common' human experiences. During the course of this analysis, the ethical implications of this central difference will become clear, as will the fact that deconstruction (unlike De George's position) presents us with an example of a complex ethics.

This chapter will proceed as follows: the criticism regarding Derrida's use of language will be addressed in section two. Not only does De George specifically raise this criticism in his article, but a discussion on Derrida's use of language also presents a good starting point for further elaborating on the differences between Derrida's approach and De George's approach. In section three, a summary will be presented of De George's understanding of ethical theory, business ethics, and CSR; as well as Jones's deconstructive reading of CSR. This will be followed by a critical evaluation of both De George's and Jones's positions. Section four will serve as a bridge between the discussion on CSR specifically, and the discussion on responsibility generally. The analysis will be conducted at the hand of Derrida's deconstructive reading of the master-slave dialectic in Hegel, and Aristotle's distinction between the *oikos* and *chrematistics.* The implications that this analysis holds for the capital-labour dialectic, as well as for our understanding of responsibility will also be addressed. The question of responsibility is elaborated upon in section five. Jones's circumscription of a Derridean notion of responsibility is presented, and the explicit criticism that De George raises with regard to this circumscription, is also addressed. In section six, specific emphasis is placed on Derrida's understanding of the ethical relation, undecidability, and justice, as these notions further help to clarify a Derridean understanding of responsibility. Section seven follows with an explanation of why a Derridean circumscription of responsibility does not imply ethical impotence – as is maintained by De George. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main insights gleaned during the course of the analysis. The summary takes the form of several short arguments for incorporating Derridean ideas (and complexity-based ideas) in our thinking on CSR and business ethics.

2. Language, deconstruction, and ethics

In chapter two (sec. 4), it was stated that both Walton (1993) and Gustafson (2000) take issue with the postmodernists' use of jargon, arguing that postmodernism will enjoy a larger reception in business ethics, if postmodernists stuck to clear formulations. In terms of jargon, the writings of Derrida are a case in point, and many critics have complained bitterly about his style of writing[59]. As such, before embarking on a substantive discussion of CSR, it is first necessary to comment on this methodological issue. The frustration with Derrida's use of language is summarised by De George (2008: 80) in the question: why does the text not simply state clearly what it holds, and present the arguments supporting it claims? Although Derrida is difficult to understand at times, and although some of his comments do border on the obscure, De George's question is addressed in this section, in order to show why Derrida's use of language presents an attempt to respect otherness. An argument will also be made for why reducing our complex reality to simple formulations – which are often also purported to represent objective or truthful accounts of our reality – can hold ethical implications.

2.1. On the possibility of unambiguous statements: a Derridean understanding of language

De George's (2008) own 'Derridean' answer to the question posed above (namely, why can Derrida's claims and arguments not be clearly stated?) is that if a text 'could be stated boldly, it would be false' (81); or, more subtly – and with specific reference to Jones's text, in which Derrida's style of writing is mimicked – any attempt to state the point simply would reduce the 'complex, dialectical, fluid and pregnant cogitations to static, flat, truisms, or more accurately falsehoods' (81). According to De George then, the simple answer to the above question is that Jones's text 'says exactly what it means, just as Derrida does' (81). De George is correct in saying that Derrida's (and Jones's) writing styles try to capture something of the ambiguity and complexity of speech and writing; but, the assertion that simple language is equal to falsehoods, or that Derrida says 'exactly what he means', are at odds with a view on language that tries to account for the complexities that define communication.

As was explained in chapter four (sec. 2.2.2.), Derrida follows Saussure in his understanding of language as a system of differences. However, Derrida departs from Saussure with regard to

[59] In this regard, consider the following two comments published in articles in the popular press:
'Many otherwise unmalicious people have in fact been guilty of wishing for deconstruction's demise - if only to relieve themselves of the burden of trying to understand it' (Stephens, 1994).
'The trouble with reading Mr. Derrida is that there is too much perspiration for too little inspiration' (Kandell (2004) citing a 1992 editorial from *The Economist* in which the Cambridge affair was commented upon).

Saussure's understanding of the sign. For Saussure (1960), the sign is still constituted by a signifier (that which a word refers to) and a signified (the physical referent). Despite Saussure's insistence on the purely differential nature of the sign, Derrida argues that there still remains a rigorous distinction between the signifier and the signified in Saussure's work. This makes it possible to think of the signified as a 'transcendental signified', or as a concept that is simply present to thought, and hence, is independent of the linguistic system (Culler, 1983: 188). Derrida (1981: 19-20) argues that once one 'recognizes that every signified is also in the position of a signifier, the distinction between signifier and signified and thus the notion of the sign becomes problematic at its roots.'

According to Culler (1983: 188), this does not mean that we should abolish the distinction between signifier and signified, but only that the difference between the two is non-substantial. In other words, '[t]here are no final meanings that arrest the movement of signification' (188). This means that no matter how lucidly we state our arguments, our words and concepts will never correspond with the proper, the truth, absolute proximity or self-presence. Writing and speech – even arche-writing (the original grunt for food, so-to-speak) – already represent a mode of cutting, the 'worlding of the world' (Grosz, 2000: 191), or a certain arche-violence that marks the word as 'always already split, repeated, incapable of appearing to itself except in its own disappearance' (Derrida, 1976: 112). This argument is further supported by the logic of the supplement, play, *différance*, and the trace which pervades our systems of meaning, and which prevents us from determining the origin of truth; and, therefore, the truth of our assertions (see chap. 4, sec. 2.3.). In other words, De George's remark that, for Derrida, simple language is equal to falsehoods is simply wrong! Rather, in writing in a particular style, Derrida is trying to demonstrate the difficulties that we experience in using categories such as right and wrong, truth and falsehood.

The same point can be made with a complexity argument: as stated in chapter three (secs 5.1. & 5.2.), the complexity of a system does not reside in the individual components that constitute the system, but in the non-linear, dynamic relations between the components of the system. If systems were homogenous and symmetrical, it would, in principle, be possible to figure the system out (Cilliers, 1998). However, since this is not the case, one has to reckon with the dynamic nature of the play of differences that constitute meaning in complex systems. Again, one can argue that there is no pure origin that one can get at with enough work, although many people – including those who support a restricted view of complexity – still succumb to this seductive belief. Rather, complexity is an inherent characteristic of systems. Applied to language, this means that we can never say exactly what we mean, as is maintained by De George.

2.2. The violence of language and ethical implications

As shown above, the dynamic play of differences, which give rise to irreducible or generalised complexity, means that language is not a substantial, transparent medium with a fixed meaning. A second argument against the clarity of language can also be made when one considers the violence inherent to language.

In the 'Afterword', Derrida (1988a: 113) asks whether it is certain that we can eliminate the violence and ambiguity of texts, or whether it is 'even certain that we should try *at all costs*'? This single question looms behind Derrida's entire philosophical project, as becomes clear from Elizabeth Grosz's (2000) exploration of violence in Derrida's work. She raises the question of violence in Derrida's work not only with regard to obvious and manifest violence – i.e. street violence, war, discrimination etc. – but also in terms of more subtle forms of violence (which are rarely termed violence), namely the violence that manifests in the 'domain of knowledge, reflection, thinking and writing' (190). In these domains, we have to account for not only the primordial or arche-violence or the splitting of the world, but also for reparatory or compensatory violence, which Grosz (193) defines as:

> the violence whose function it is to erase the traces of this primordial violence, akind of counter-violence whose violence consists in the denial of violence… This is a violence that describes and designates itself as the moral counter of violence. This is the violence that we sometimes name the law, right, or reason.

In light of the above, Derrida certainly doesn't say *exactly* what he means (as if such a thing were possible); nor would it be fair to say that trying to capture something of the ambiguity of language or pregnant cognitions of language represents an attempt to avoid falsehoods, if by falsehoods one means the opposite of truths. However, denying a certain privileged status to truth does not mean that one is impotent to act. Grosz not only argues for the primacy of violence in Derrida's work, but also for politics and ethics. Indeed, it is *because* of the inescapable violence in language and in being, that ethics and politics are such central themes in Derrida's work. Grosz argues that – far from immobilising the practices of politics and ethics, or of refusing to provide answers to political or ethical problems (as is often alleged by his critics) – Derrida offers a profound reconfiguration of the ethical and political activity that centres on the question of violence (190-191). In this regard, Grosz (190) states:

> What makes Derrida's work at once intensely political and ethical, while he remains acutely aware of the problems involved in any straightforward avowal of one's commitments to political and ethical values, is his readiness to accept that no protocol, no rhetorical or intellectual ploy is simply innocent, motivated by reason, knowledge or truth alone, but carries with it an inherent undecidability and repeatability that recontextualizes it and frees it from any origin or end.

The type of falsehood that Derrida is, therefore, trying to avoid in his writings is a moral falsehood: a complacent denial of the violence that we employ every time that we use language, every time that we argue for a specific position, or every time that we proclaim the Truth of our assertions. Language – like our systems of meaning – is limited and exclusionary: in voicing one position, we deny another, which may be no less relevant. Once again, complexity theory can help us to make this argument. This is because the ethics of modelling, which bears on the organisation of knowledge itself (Morin, 2007), is critical to our understanding of complexity. As explained in chapter three (sec. 6.1.), we do not have full access to the phenomena of interest due to the irreducible complexity with which we have to grapple. This incompressibility of complexity introduces a normative dimension to our descriptions and explanations of the world because we are forced to make certain choices, judgements, and decisions when modelling our world. There is, therefore, no way in which we can escape ethics.

Given the above, what should be called into question are positions, which – like De George's (2008: 80) – gain their status on the basis of being 'not idiosyncratic' but 'compatible with most other presentations', simply because such positions are in danger of perpetuating an even greater violence, namely the denial of violence in the name of law, right, or reason. This is not to say that we cannot develop a body of knowledge, or a community of practice. Rather, the point is that we should guard against the naturalisation of meaning that scholarship can bring about. This point is particularly crucial in the context of ethics, and we should be very weary of relegating differences between contexts and practices to 'non-moral responsibilities' (as does De George (76)). Once we naturalise ethics in this way, any understanding of ethics which may deviate from the dominant interpretation can easily be construed as patently wrong, or as something which threatens to poison the purity of our common experiences. In order to make this argument in more detail, let us turn to a more specific account of De George's understanding of business ethics and CSR.

3. Explaining and evaluating De George's and Jones's perspectives on corporate social responsibility

3.1. De George's account of corporate social responsibility, ethical theory and business ethics

As mentioned, De George (2008) starts his article with a distinction between North American and European CSR practices, but also adds the qualification that '[o]f course, there are broad areas of overlap' (74). De George maintains that, whereas the European emphasis in business ethics is on structures and systems, North American business ethicists have focused more on individuals (74-75). He traces this divide back to the historical development of CSR, arguing that corporate social responsibilities '*to the extent that they are not ethical or moral responsibilities*, reflect the expectations and demands of the societies in which the corporations are found and/or where they operate' (76; my italics). It is not entirely clear what De George means when he refers to social responsibilities that are not 'morally motivated', especially since, in the next paragraph, he states that societal demands that go beyond the law 'arise from considerations of what is sometimes disparagingly called conventional morality' (77).

In his discussion on ethical theory two pages on, De George (78) again refers to this notion of conventional morality, stating that '[e]very society has a morality' and that '[t]he function of an ethical theory, on this view, is to make sense of our common human and individual moral experience'. Herein perhaps lies the clue to why only non-moral corporate social responsibilities differ depending on the context. If we have a *common* human and moral experience, any differences that arise cannot be as a result of a difference in our fundamental conceptions of morality. This argument is made more explicit in the following paragraph, where De George (78) states that '[b]ecause all ethical theories start from the conventional morality found in society, all of them provide a justification for prohibitions on murder, theft, perjury, rape, incest, and so on.' De George is critical of textbooks that emphasise the differences between normative ethical theories, arguing instead that these theories have a lot more similarities than differences. In other words, they all affirm our sense of common morality, whether the arguments are grounded in consequences (Mill), virtues (Aristotle), or duty (Kant). On this view, moral progress is made 'by coming to learn new facts about the world and society', and 'by developing a greater insight into what it is that we hold as our core moral beliefs' (78).

De George (78-79) further argues that '[w]hat is the case for ethics and morality in general is the case as well for business ethics' and that different views of CSR cannot be ascribed to differences in

common morality, but difference in how societies are structured. Therefore, he maintains that in terms of business ethics and CSR, we see that the roles and responsibilities of individual managers form the focus of scholarship in the USA, whereas European business ethicists have been more concerned with whether the systems in which business and government operate are just (79) – but, to reiterate, the responses to these issues are presumably motivated from the same moral base.

After these introductory remarks, De George turns his attention to a critique of Jones's (2007) article, entitled 'Friedman with Derrida'. After briefly summarising the deconstructive approach as an 'attack on foundationlist thinking', De George asks 'what the approach of Derrida and his followers can add to the concept and practice of CSR or more broadly to ethics in general or business ethics in particular' considering that deconstructionists are not interested in constructing systems or in replacing existing systems with new ones (De George, 2008: 80)? This is the central question posed, and judging by the conclusion cited in chapter four (sec 4.2.)[60], De George is evidently not happy with Jones's attempt to show why business ethicists should engage in a deconstructive ethics. But, this is jumping the gun: let us start with an overview of Jones's (2007) deconstructive reading of CSR in his article, entitled 'Friedman with Derrida'.

3.2. Friedman with Derrida: Jones's deconstruction of the shareholder-stakeholder perspectives

In his article, Jones (2007) cautiously reads Friedman with Derrida, in an attempt to give something back to Friedman i.e. '[f]irst of all his own words' (512). Jones treats Friedman as an exemplary for CSR, and moreover argues that Friedman represents the shareholder perspective on CSR (which is typically contrasted with the stakeholder perspective). Jones describes the shareholder-stakeholder debate as presenting a binary opposition, which he attempts to destabilise through considering 'the texture of [Friedman's] text' (514), or – in Friedman's own words (1953: 43) – to seek 'the vision of something new in familiar material'[61]. The familiar material Jones concentrates on is Friedman's 'golden 48 words':

> there is one and only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game,

[60] The citation referred to is the following: 'The onus is on Jones and other followers of Derrida to show, how, by using 'the categories made available in the writings of Jacques Derrida' (Jones, 2007), those in CSR and business ethics can do, and do more effectively, what they want to do and what they cannot do without these categories' (De George, 2008: 85)

[61] In a footnote, Jones (2007: 529) comments on how well these words resonate with Derrida's own deconstructive strategy.

> which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud (Friedman, 1962: 133).

The above quotation appears in *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), but it again appears in 1970 in a *New York Times Magazine* article, where Friedman quotes himself in explaining that *Capitalism and Freedom* represents an account of what happens in a free society. However, Jones (2007: 515) notes that these two quotes are not exactly alike:

> The problem is that this quote [the 1970 quote] is not a quote, or better, it is a quote but the quote does not say what he says it says. Friedman quotes himself accurately within the quotation marks, that is to say, he reproduces the 48 words exactly, including the punctuation... The crucial slip is that Friedman's misquotation that appears just before the quotation marks begin. The slip: in the 1970 *New York Times Magazine* essay he claims that these 48 words describe a "free society"; in *Capitalism and Freedom* these 48 words describe a "free economy".

Apart from the slippage that occurs due to this 'misquotation' before the beginning of the citation in the 1970 text, Jones also notes that a similar problem occurs at the end of the citation in the 1970 text: the text stops abruptly after the citation. This is in contrast to the 1962 text, which ends with the sentence: 'Similarly, the 'social responsibility' of labor leaders is to serve the interests of the members of their unions' (Friedman, 1962: 133). Thus, in the 1962 text we see that a free economy is characterised by two parties (each with their own responsibility): namely, corporate officials and labour leaders (Jones, 2007: 516-517). Jones argues that, contrary to the common perception that Friedman views profit as the only interest to be protected in a free economy, in the 1962 text we read that 'capitalism is organized around a basic contradiction or conflict of interest between capital and labour' (517).

This reading destabilises the binary opposition that governs the shareholder-stakeholder perspectives, as it is no longer possible to claim that the stakeholder position sets itself apart from the shareholder position on the grounds that it recognises several parties that might have a stake in business (517).

3.3. Meaning, intentionality, and slippages

3.3.1. Critical evaluation of De George's argument: against slippages, for differences

With regard to Jones's reading of Friedman's 'golden 48 words', De George (2008: 81) makes the comment that Friedman's conflation of 'free economy' with 'free society' seems to suggest to Jones that Friedman does not know what he is talking about[62]. De George provides an alternative reading on this point, stating that Friedman's claim 'about the social responsibility of business is the same whether one speaks of a free economy or a free society, which for him requires a free economy. In this case there is no slippage or lapse' (81). Firstly, with regard to De George's interpretation, one could argue that a free economy does not necessarily lead to a free society (think of China which has a free economy, but not a free society – at least not by Western standards).

Perhaps Friedman did, as De George suggests, knowingly conflate a free society with a free economy when deducing the responsibilities of business; but, in so doing, a whole series of questions pertinent to the matter at hand, are negated, such as: Do the mechanisms at work in a free society lead to the same expectations regarding businesses' responsibilities, as do the mechanisms at work in a free economy? Do our notions of freedom vary, given different contexts? Can societies and economies be more or less free, and is there a direct correlation between the degree of societal freedom and the degree of economic freedom? In which ways do free economies support or even undermine societal notions of freedom? Jones (2007: 522) alludes to these type of questions when he states that it 'should be apparent from the current and urgent global struggles [that we do not know] what it might mean to live and work in anything that might meaningfully be called a free economy or a free society.'

[62] In this regard, one could argue that Jones (2007) is once again mimicking Derrida's style and strategy. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida (1976: 163) explicitly argues that the word supplement constitutes a 'blind spot' in Rousseau's text, because although he employs the word, its logic is veiled to him. This prompts Critchley (1999a: 54) to state that Derrida's 'formulation implies… a certain delusion on Rousseau's part: namely, that he did not mean to say what he actually said, and that what he actually meant to say is in contradiction with what he said in the text'. Jones (2007) seems to be attributing a similar delusion to Friedman. However, this strategy has met with some criticism. Specifically, Paul de Man (1983: 139) argues that 'Rousseau's text has no blind spots'. Consequently, 'there is no need to deconstruct Rousseau'. However, de Man is also critical of the established tradition of reading Rousseau, arguing that his texts have been systematically misread. In this vein, de Man calls Derrida 'Rousseau's best modern interpreter' (135) (For an extended and more detailed discussion of this point, see Critchley, 1999a: 54-55).
Viewed in a charitable light, one could argue that Jones's argument is not directed against Friedman specifically, but against the dominant interpretation of Friedman's works. As such, Jones is deconstructing a dominant reading, rather than a philosophical point.

However, in talking about the relation between society and the corporation (the instrument for securing the interests of business, and thus of a free economy on Friedman's view), De George (2008: 82) writes:

> Central to making sense of CSR should be a discussion of what a corporation is, why it exits, what its relation to society or the common good, if any, is. Corporations are taken at face value, even though they differ in formation and structure and in the rights they enjoy from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

De George continues by arguing that how we view the corporation will have an effect on how we think about corporate responsibilities. He further contends that the third component of CSR – namely society – is often taken for granted (despite manifest differences between contexts). He concludes that 'each part of the trio – corporations, society and responsibility – deserves analysis, as do the relations of the three, and the combination of the three into the whole' (83). Here, De George is very sensitive to the different interpretations that we can assign to our concepts. It is, therefore, a bit surprising that De George would argue that there is no slippage or lapse when one speaks of businesses' responsibilities in a free economy or in a free society. De George's own position seems to vacillate between arguments for a common humanity, and arguments for (non-moral) contextual differences that, nevertheless, have a bearing on our conceptions of responsibility.

The fact that De George seems to want it both ways suggests that Jones (2007: 521-523) is correct in claiming that any notion of CSR is always already under deconstruction, because the 'rules of the game' are up for grabs, and because we cannot conclusively reconcile all the tensions or difficulties (the *aporia*) that permeate the question of what it means to be responsible (or what it means to live in a free society or a free economy). However, the manner in which Jones sets about making this point is problematic, although for different reasons than claimed by De George.

3.3.2. Critical evaluation of Jones's argument: misunderstanding context

Let us recall what Jones (2007: 515) says with reference to Friedman's 1970 text: 'The problem is that this quote is not a quote, or better, it is a quote but the quote does not say what he says it says… Friedman's misquotation… appears just before the quotation marks begin'. Jones argument is that Friedman misquotes himself; or, rather, Friedman's interpretation of the quote is an inaccurate or untruthful rendition of what the quote says. To push the point a bit further: Friedman is not true to his words, and it seems that the reason for this is largely due to the fact that Friedman uses these

words out of context. This is what leads De George to speculate that Jones seems to think that Friedman does not know what he is talking about.

Jones's project (i.e. giving Friedman back his own words) relies on a logocentric interpretation of context. Jones views the context of *Capitalism and Freedom* as the correct and proper context for Friedman's 'golden 48 words' because it is the *original* context, whereas the context of the citation in the *New York Times Magazine* article results in a faulty derivative or a perversion of what Friedman *meant* to say. Only on this interpretation is it possible to undertake a deconstructive reading, and to show that our understanding of Friedman is wrong, or relies on a misreading (since it only accounts for capital and not labour). Although opening up Friedman's texts to new and other interpretations conforms to the spirit of deconstruction, Jones's understanding of context is very much at odds with what Derrida has to say on the matter.

In 'Living On: Border Lines', Derrida (1979: 81) writes: 'This is my starting point: no meaning can be determined out of context, but no context permits saturation. What I am referring to here is not richness of substance, semantic fertility, but rather structure, the structure of remnant or of iteration.' In 'Signature Event Context', Derrida (1988d: 7) calls iterability 'the logic that ties repetition to alterity'. For writing to be recognisable it needs to be repeatable (in other words, words must be understood across contexts). However, as soon as words enter a new context, their meanings change. Writing is iterable in the sense that its communicability depends neither on the intentions of the author, nor on the context of its composition (7-9). Writing disseminates, it moves out from the word resulting in a proliferation of meaning that cannot be controlled. Writing, like a complex view of moral agency, cannot be construed as the outcome of an intentional, causal process.

However, even supposing that we could fix writing within a given context, we find that context is boundless ('no context permits saturation'): every context is open to further description, and meaning changes as the interpretation of the context changes. Any attempt to fix context through codification 'can always be grafted onto the context it sought to describe, yielding a new context which escapes the previous formulation' (Culler, 1983: 123-124). The upshot of this is that I am always misquoting myself. Friedman's words in *Capitalism and Freedom* can never convey exactly the same meaning as his words do in the *New York Times Magazine* article, even if there was no

'misquotation' in Jones's sense. This radicalises the slippage that Jones speaks of: there is always already slippage[63]!

Jones's deconstructive reading of the dominant interpretation of Friedman's texts reintroduces labour as a party in a free economy. However, capital and labour remain two separate parties, whose interests do not mix. De George (2008: 81) comments on this explicit opposition, stating that it 'describes a real opposition that is lacking in many accounts of stakeholder theory, where the aim is often to manage competing interests.' De George's point is that to a large degree, Jones binary opposition between the shareholder and stakeholder perspectives is a set-up; and, for the most part, this binary conception does not inform the dominant understanding on CSR. Nevertheless, De George claims that such a binary evokes the master-slave dialectic in Hegel, which can be quite provocative in the context of a discussion on CSR. Although not mentioned in either De George's (2008) or Jones's (2007) texts, such an evocation recalls Derrida's (1978b) own discussion on the master-slave dialectic (at the hand of Georges Bataille) in the article, entitled 'From a restricted to general economy: a Hegelian without reserve'. Although analysing this article will represent a minor detour from the texts under discussion, the article, nevertheless, presents a good introduction to the question of responsibility, and will thus be addressed in the following section.

4. Overcoming dialectics: implications for the question of responsibility

The question of responsibility forms the focus of the second half of Jones's article, as well as the remainder of De George's critique. As such, some preliminary remarks on the possibility and the nature of responsibility are needed, before progressing to a more in depth and critical discussion of responsibility in the next section. In this section, it will be shown that the notion of responsibility commonly evoked in discussions on CSR still remains trapped within a dialectical process, which limits the meaning and impact of the term to that of maintaining an equalising justice. A Derridean notion of responsibility, on the other hand, breaks open the dialectical process and, thereby, momentarily overcomes this dialectic. This, as will be explained, creates the possibility of conceiving of justice as a gift, or of exercising a true responsibility that transcends the reciprocal demands and expectations of a circular economy.

As noted above, the section proceeds with Derrida's discussion on Hegel's master-slave dialectic. This is followed by a discussion on the logic of the *oikos* versus *chrematistics*, and the implications

[63] Also refer to the discussion on the logic of the supplement, *différance*, play, and the trace in chapter four, section 2.3.

that these economic views hold for the possibility of gift-giving. Lastly, the insights to emerge from these discussions are applied to our understanding of responsibility, particularly CSR.

4.1. The master-slave dialectic in Hegel and the introduction of the sovereign

The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy[64] offers the following introduction to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977), in which the master-slave dialectic is discussed:

> Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is… to be regarded as a type of "propaedeutic" to philosophy rather than an exercise in it – a type of induction or education of the reader to the "standpoint" of purely conceptual thought of philosophy itself. As such, its structure has been compared to that of a "*Bildungsroman*" (educational novel), having an abstractly conceived protagonist – the bearer of an evolving series of "shapes of consciousness" or the inhabitant of a series of successive phenomenal worlds – whose progress and set-backs the reader follows and learns from.

In the development towards self-consciousness, the master-slave dialectic plays a prominent role, and according to Kohn (2005: 497), Hegel's description of this struggle between master and slave 'is one of the most powerful images in the history of philosophy'. The famous Hegelian scholar, Alexandre Kojève (1969: 3) writes that man becomes conscious of himself 'at the moment when – for the "first" time – he says "I"' (in other words, when he becomes conscious of his human reality and dignity). However, each 'self-consciousness' can only be certain of itself once another human recognises it as authoritative (Kohn, 2005: 497). The dissolution of the isolated 'I' is, therefore, the result of the first experience or the first '(murderous) fight' (Kojève, 1969: 15) with another, in which both parties try to force the other to recognise him/her as a self-conscious subject, whilst withholding reciprocal recognition (Kohn, 2005: 497). The struggle ends when one party triumphs as an independent consciousness existing for itself (Hegel, 1977: 115). The other party chooses submission and life over death, thereby accepting its essential reality as animal-life, i.e. given-being for an other-entity. Whereas the former party is the master or lord, the latter party is the slave or bondsman (Kohn, 2005: 497; Kojève, 1969: 16). Hegel (1977: 115) describes the implications of this struggle as follows:

[64] See 'Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel' in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Available online at: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel/ First published on 13 February, 1997; revised on 26 June, 2006.

> The lord is the consciousness that exists *for itself,* but no longer merely the Notion of such a consciousness. Rather, it is a consciousness existing *for itself* which is mediated with itself through another consciousness, i.e. through a consciousness whose nature it is to be bound up with as an existence that is dependent, or thinghood in general. The lord puts himself into relation with both these moments, to a *thing* as such, the object of desire, and to consciousness for which thinghood is the essential characteristic.

In other words, the outcome of the struggle creates the dialectic between master and slave. On the one hand, the slave (in wanting to conserve his life) is held in the master's domination, thereby providing the master with self-conscious certainty. This is because the master's reality is no longer subjective and immediate, but objectified and mediated by the slave's recognition. The master, however, recognises the slaves reality as a consciousness for whom 'thingness' is the essential entity (in that the slave, who refuses to risk, binds himself completely to the things on which he depends) (Kojève, 1969: 16-17). On the other hand, the master is related in a mediated way to the 'thing as such' or the object of desire, through means of the slave. This is because it is the slave's job to transform natural objects, or raw materials with the view of their consumption by the master (17).

From the above description, Derrida (1978b: 254) defines lordship as 'an obligatory stage in the history of self-consciousness and phenomenality' and thus 'in the presentation of meaning'. However, lordship, nevertheless, remains trapped within the dialectic, since the lord or master needs the bondsman or slave to confirm his independent self-conscious existence: 'The *truth* of the independent consciousness is accordingly the servile consciousness of the bondsman' (Hegel, 1977: 117). This is because lordship is premised not only on life, but also on the slave. The truth of the lord is the slave, and the master must do work to keep the slave repressed, in order to experience pure self-consciousness. Therefore, the master's consciousness 'is not an autonomous Consciousness, but all to the contrary, a dependent consciousness, that exists for [the slave]' (Kojève, 1969: 20).

The tragedy of the master is that the master's being *for itself* is premised on the slave's recognition of his essential being. However, the slave (whose consciousness remains 'thingness') is not a being worthy of respect and dignity. Thus, as Kojève (19) explains:

> The master has fought and risked his life for a recognition without value for him. For he can be satisfied only by recognition from one whom he recognizes as worthy of recognizing

> him. The Master's attitude, is an existential impasse. On the one hand, the Master is Master, only because his Desire was directed not toward a thing, but toward another desire – thus, it was a desire for recognition. On the other, when he has consequently become Master, it is as Master that he must desire to be recognized; and he can he recognized as such only by making the Other his Slave. But the Slave is for him an animal or a thing. He is, therefore, "recognized" by a thing. Thus, finally, his Desire is directed toward a thing, and not – as it seemed at first toward a (human) Desire.

Ironically then, the master is enslaved by the consciousness of the bondsman, who represents an animal or thing, as opposed to the independent consciousness of an equal. Servility is, therefore, the condition of lordship (Derrida, 1978b: 255). Unlike the master, however, the slave can transcend lordship. Kojève (1969: 20) explains that the slave 'as *repressed* Consciousness' can 'go within itself and reverse and transform itself into true autonomy'. The way in which the slave can overcome his slavery is through work, and by establishing a relationship with work which, as Derrida (1978b: 255) and Kojève (1969: 24-25) explain, is characterised by the deferral of pleasure. Unlike the master (who immediately negates desire, and, hence, life in pleasurable consumption), the slave must inhibit his desires (work is repressed desire), and delay the disappearance of the thing (by first transforming it through work). Through trans-forming things in the world, the slave is thus able to transform himself into a formed and educated man (25). Therefore, in summary:

> just as lordship showed that its essential nature is the reverse of what it wants to be, so too servitude in its consummation will really turn into the opposite of what it immediately is; as a consciousness forced back into itself, it will withdraw into itself and be transformed into a truly independent consciousness (25).

Although the dialectic between master and slave is radically revised through Hegel's analysis of this relationship, one can nevertheless argue (as does Derrida, 1978b) that the dialectic remains. Hegel replaces biological life, as the hallmark of lordship, with work and the repression of desire. In other words, Hegel has replaced abstract negation with determinate negation. Whereas the former implies a non-productive death in immediate consumption, the latter constitutes the 'tarrying with the negative' (Hegel, 1977: 19). Hegel prefers the latter conception of negation, since the binary (between life and death) is not static, but mediated by desire and, therefore, refers to 'the dialectical in his transcendental sense' (Vitanza, 1997: 83). Derrida (1978b: 255-256) concludes that:

> Through this recourse to the *Aufhebung,* which conserves the stakes, remains in control of the play, limiting it and elaborating it by giving it form and meaning (*Die Arbeit… bildet*), this economy of life restricts itself to conservation, to circulation and self-reproduction of meaning.

It is specifically this economy that Bataille (1947) (in his engagement with Hegel) wishes to escape. Whereas Hegel's position represents a totalising idealism (which manifests in the *Aufhebung,* and in the presence of meaning); Bataille's position (although predicated on Hegel's system) attempts to break out of this system, and to live in excess of death. In other words, Bataille introduces a third term – namely, sovereignty – which liberates itself from enslavement to meaning (to which lordship is bound). Sovereignty finds its expression in a radical, or absolute negativity – in 'a negativity that never takes place, that never *presents* itself, because in doing so it would start to work again' (Derrida, 1978b: 256). In living the excess of death, Bataille pulls sovereignty out of the dialectic, frees it from the stakes, and thereby causes a disruption that prevents the system from playing out in terms of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*. In other words, sovereignty is the singular event in which meaning sinks and vanishes, before being taken up again in the dialectic (255-256).

Wherein does meaning sink and vanish? According to Derrida (255-256): in a burst of laughter that never literally appears because it exceeds the possibility of meaning. The system of the sovereign operation (which, according to Bataille (1947), is characterised by 'drunkenness, erotic effusion, sacrificial effusion, poetic effusion, heroic behaviour, anger, absurdity') represents the attempt to overcome the Hegelian system, and to engage with an excess that leads to freedom. The system of the sovereign operation is thus referred to as a general economy.

It is noteworthy that Derrida (1978b) frames the difference between a Hegelian and Bataillian economy in terms of a restricted and a general economy. As discussed in the introduction of chapter three, Morin (2007) also uses these terms to refer to different paradigms of complexity. Whereas the term restricted complexity refers to complexity that can, in principle, be overcome; general complexity refers to a paradigm in which the term 'complexity' is taken seriously, hence necessitating an epistemological, cognitive, and paradigmatic shift in our view of knowledge. Applied to Derrida's circumscription of Bataille's sovereign operation, this means that Bataille's general economy is characterised by a complexity that exceeds calculation and complete knowledge.

However, as argued in chapter three, the only way in which we can meaningfully engage with this complexity is to reduce it by modelling it. Thus, Derrida describes the general economy as something 'totally other' (Derrida, 1978b: 256), 'an excess outside of reason' (255), which never literally appears, because for it to be appear, it would need to be drawn back into the horizon of meaning and knowledge. However, despite the fact that the sovereign operation takes place beyond meaning, it, nevertheless, serves the important function of limiting the restricted economy, by making 'the seriousness of meaning appear as an abstraction inscribed in play' (256). The sovereign is the supplement, the trace, *différance* which prevents the Hegelian *Aufhebung* from playing out, thereby both frustrating the quest for perfect knowledge, and introducing a humility into our paradigms of meaning.

4.2. Gift-giving: from a restricted to a general economy

The idea of the restricted and general economy can also be conveyed in terms other than lordship and sovereignty. In *Given Time* (1992a), Derrida calls on the distinction between the economic and the an-economic – which has its origin in Aristotle's *Politics* (1256a -1258b) – in order to present us with another way of thinking about the differences between the restricted and general economy.

In Aristotle, the sphere of the economic is the sphere of the proper or the *oikos* (what Derrida (1994: 26) calls 'la cloture économique'). It is the closed sphere of the home and the hearth, wherein a virtuous relation with the economic is possible. Such a virtuous relation is established through practicing an 'equalising justice' i.e. repaying good with good (Critchley, 1999b: 168). The an-economic, on the other hand, represents the improper to ethical life i.e. money-making or *chrematistics.* This is because it refers to situation in which 'the use value of an object has been exceeded by exchange value, that is to say, when the de(con)structable infiniteness of accumulation and desire has been introduced into the finite circle of the *oikos*' (168). Once open-ended desire is introduced into the *oikos*, the calculable and symmetrical structure of an equalising justice is ruined. As Derrida (1992a:158-159) notes, the ethically proper is contingent upon limits, which can be controlled and mastered, whereas the ethically improper marks a transgression of these limits: 'for Aristotle, it is a matter of an ideal and desirable limit, a limit between the limit and the unlimited, between the true and finite good (the economic) and the illusionary and indefinite good (the chrematistic)'.

Derrida (1992a: 158; 2002c: 321) reinscribes Aristotle's understanding of limit and non-limit as 'need and desire'. Whereas our needs are limited, our desires are unlimited[65]. In other words, unlike our human needs (which can be sated), desire merely breeds desire: as soon as one desire is met, it is replaced by the next one. The difference between need and desire can be well-illustrated in terms of the difference between natural resources and money: whereas natural resources can spoil or be used up, 'the *fetishism of money*' (2002c: 321) overcomes these limits. For Derrida (1992a: 158) money (defined as the possibility of *différance* and credit), therefore, represents a kind of deconstruction: 'As soon as there is money the *oikos* is opened and cannot operate its limit'.

Chrematistics, as the expression of desire through the fetishism of money, therefore, 'forms both the spirit of the market [*l'esprit du marché*] and the market spirit [*l'esprit de marché*]', as Derrida (2002c: 321) explains in 'On the "Priceless"'. He goes on to state that *chrematistics* is everything that infinitely exceeds 'the limits of need, of the useful, of the natural, the reasonable, the calculable, the stable relation between production and consumption, between the *chez soi* and the *chez l'autre*' (321). In other words, whereas the economy of the home and the hearth is intimate and known, the market economy is vast, and unknown, resulting in 'consequences of the incalculable' (321).

One consequence resulting from the transgression of the oikos and the family is market speculation, which Derrida (321) defines as 'the labor without labor of capital, the accumulation, the fetishism of the commodity and the monetary sign'. Whilst this is by no means a positive development, *chrematistics*, in ruining the ethicality of the proper, also creates the possibility for conceiving of an ethics that transcends the proper. In other words, just as the sovereign can transcend the master-slave dialectic, in order to introduce play, possibility, and space within the system; so too *chrematistics* (in creating infinite possibilities and incalculable consequences) offers 'the chance for any kind of hospitality… the chance for the gift itself. The chance for the event.' (Derrida, 1992a: 158; see also: Derrida, 2002c).

Critchley (1999b: 169) explains this citations as follows: money (in disrupting the restricted economy, or in passing beyond economic calculation) opens up the possibility for a form of an-economic giving, for a donation without return (the opposite of 'equalising justice'), and, therefore, for the possibility of the gift or of an irreducible justice. For Derrida the possibility of the gift is marked by its very impossibility. Following Derrida (1992a), John Caputo (1997b: 141-143)

[65] See Krell's (1988: 7-11) text 'Engorged philosophy: a note on Freud, Derrida, and *Différance*' for a description of the economy of need and desire.

explains that within a circular economy, a gift begins to annul itself as soon as it is given, because a reciprocal expectation is created when I say 'thank you' for the gift. Gifts are, therefore, more-or-less economic transaction, even though they do not appear as such. Pure gift-giving can only take place beyond intentionality, where one neither intends nor expects to give or receive a gift. Caputo (1997b: 144) writes that, for Derrida, the only way out of this *aporia* – this pollution of the gift – is 'to push against this limit, to transgress this boundary as far as possible, or (im)possible, to make a passage to the limits, to embrace this impossibility, to try to do *the im*-possible, which is not a simple logical contradiction.' In other words, true gift-giving must take place beyond the calculable programme, and, therefore, within the domain of *chrematistics*. In this context, 'the gift is precisely, and this is what it has in common with justice, something which cannot be reappropriated' (Derrida, 1997: 18). Elsewhere, Derrida (1992b: 25) offers the following characterisation of the structure of justice as gift:

> The "idea of justice" seems to be irreducible in its affirmative character, in its demand of gift without exchange, without circulation, without recognition or gratitude, without economic circularity, without calculation and without rules, without reason and without rationality. And so we can recognize in it, indeed accuse, identify a madness… And deconstruction is mad about this kind of justice. Mad about the desire for justice.

4.3. Beyond the capital-labour dialectic: CSR and the question of responsibility

In returning to our discussion on CSR, we can say that – as with the introduction of the sovereign to the master-slave dialectic, or the introduction of *chrematistics* to the dialectic that governs the *oikos* – a Derridean notion of corporate responsibility can only take place in the space beyond the calculable programme of the capital-labour dialectic. If corporations only practice responsibility within the limits of the dialectic, responsibility becomes no more than the practice of corporate duties and responsibilities, as determined by society in exchange for certain corporate rights and privileges. In other words, responsibility, on this take, would be solely determined by the social contract – which stipulates the terms for an equalising justice or circular exchange between societal interest groups and economic interests groups.

It is acknowledged that this view of responsibility (as an equalising or compensatory justice) informs the dominant understanding of responsibility in the CSR debate. However, what should be clear at this juncture is that Derrida has a much more radical notion of responsibility in mind – one that definitely introduces a new category to the CSR debate. In a nutshell, Derrida's notion of

responsibility provides a challenge to 'responsibility' conceptualised within the framework of the status quo, by drawing attention to the incalculable possibilities and consequences deriving from different notions of responsibility. Such a reinscription of responsibility is certainly not premised on the idea of a common humanity, but rather represents an attempt to think beyond the possible, and view responsibility as a demand without exchange, without recognition, and without rules. On this view, responsibility becomes an expression of ethical complexity, and functions as a regulating or ideal concept – something which, in practice, always pushes the limits of its own expression.

In order to determine what this notion of responsibility (defined as a new category in the CSR debate) can help us do (and do more effectively) what other available categories can't, let us turn to a more in depth analysis of the Derridean view of responsibility.

5. Responsibility and CSR

It has been argued that Jones's deconstruction of Friedman's text is premised on a logocentric interpretation of context. However, it would be unfair to only interpret his text in terms of this argument. Jones's text – especially in his careful consideration of how deconstruction is always already at work – shows a sensitivity for the Derridean view that there is always an excess which escapes the calculable programme of the restricted economy. As a starting point to the discussion on responsibility, we turn to Jones's reading of a Derridean view of responsibility, in order to tease out what a notion of responsibility that exceeds calculation might entail. This is followed by De George's critique of this circumscription of responsibility, which boils down to the charge of relativism. This critique is addressed at the hand of some empirical examples, which are analysed in order to show why Derrida's position amounts to a modest and responsible stance, and not to a relativist stance.

5.1. Jones reads Derrida

In his discussion on responsibility, Jones (2007: 525) refers to Derrida's book, *The Gift of Death* (1995a). Jones argues that this text draws from Emmanuel Levinas's understanding of responsibility, but also constitutes a response to Levinas. The central question posed in this text is whom to give to? Or, which Other to respond to? Jones (2007: 525) contends that Derrida takes up, refines and extends the Levinasian view of responsibility as an event that calls the subject into

question by demanding a response to the needs of the Other[66]. Jones (525) states that Derrida treats the question of responsibility through 'a thinking of the welcome, hospitality, and justice, and in the practical spheres of border control, immigration, xenophobia, war, globalization and the future of Europe.' These subjects all gesture at what Jones (525) calls the general place of responsibility in deconstruction i.e. how one is to think of responsibility in the name of that which is still to come (in other words, that which lies beyond the calculable programme or the restricted economy). Jones (525) also speaks of the specific place of responsibility in deconstruction, with reference to Derrida's 'quasi-concepts', which attest to responsibility. In this regard, Jones (525-526) references Derrida's work on 'the adieu, admiration, alibi, aporia, cosmopolitanism, enlightenment, Europe, forgiveness, friendship, hospitality, inheritance, justice, memory, mourning, paperlessness, the gift, the impossible, the rogue, touching.' However, as with the subjects mentioned in relation to the general place of responsibility, Jones does not elaborate on what these 'quasi-concepts' entail.

Jones (526) argues that both the general and the specific place of responsibility in deconstruction work to reinforce the point that 'responsibility involves undecidability… [which] is the condition of possibility for ethics, politics and justice, and responsibility.' Jones (526) continues by stating that '[o]ne is only responsible when one is not sure if one has been responsible. If we have the certainty that we are in The Good, then it has slipped away.' Both these citations refer to a notion of responsibility that escapes the dialectics of the restricted economy, where undecidability, as opposed to the certainty of circular exchange, determines the mode of responsible action. Jones's (526) concluding view is that 'any conversation about responsibility [and, therefore, any conversation about corporate social responsibility] that failed to engage with these debates would be irresponsible'.

[66] Levinas understands ethics to be something prior to moral questions, and *a fortiori* to moral law. In other words, Levinas is first and foremost concerned with 'the primordial ethical experience' from which certain moral questions, maxims and judgements may be derived (Critchley, 1999a: 3). This ethical experience begins with recognising the otherness of the Other, which takes place in the face-to-face encounter with the other that serves to challenge my 'subjecthood' or 'myself as ego or as subject with inalienable priority' (Howells, 1998:124). It is through challenging or questioning my primacy as subject, that the face of the other frees me from reification, and consequently grounds the ethical (125). Levinas thus defines ethics as 'the putting into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the other' (Levinas, 1969:43).
However, the encounter with the face of the other is not a neutral experience of mutual confirmation and reciprocity, but rather an experience that both initiates and stops violence (hence, the experience places one in the position of the hostage). As described by Howells (1998: 125):

> the otherness of the other as free transcendent subject both arouses my hostility and is also what causes it to cease, in so far as the face initiates an experience of transcendence and freedom which commands respect for the Other. And, this respect is the primary [and immediate] imperative: the 'incarnation' of non-violence.

(The above description is taken from Vrba (Woermann), 2006: 70.)

5.2. De George's critique

De George (2008: 81-85) spends some time unpacking the view of responsibility sketched by Jones. His first point of critique is that Jones's circumscription of a Derridean view of responsibility is not very helpful to the uninformed reader who is interested in CSR, and indeed, Jones perfunctory overview of the categories related to responsibility confirms this point. De George (81) continues by arguing that Jones leaves untouched a series of questions related to the notion of CSR, especially questions related to the interplay of responsibility, society, and the corporation. In this regard, De George asks whether a Derridean notion of responsibility translates into traditional moral or legal categories where intentional agents are causally accountable for their actions; and, if not, questions what a Derridean notion of responsibility amount to.

More specifically, De George's (81-82) critique is that the claims 'responsibility involves undecidability' or '[o]ne is only responsible when one is not sure if one has been responsible' are not *practically* very helpful for those struggling with questions pertaining to CSR. These claims, on the contrary, seem to suggest that any answer to such questions would be inappropriate, since on De George's (82) reading, '[i]t is not clear that Derrida recognizes any objectively right action, and hence one is always unsure because there is nothing to be sure about.' Therefore, according to De George (81), a deconstructive reading of responsibility does not allow us to measure responsibility, to relate it to praise, blame, shame, punishment, or any other notions with which it forms a conceptual net. Although not explicitly stated, De George's critique boils down to the charge of relativism. In this regard, consider specifically the following example used by De George (82):

> It appears that on Derrida's view, if a corporate manager decides to pay much more than the going wage in a less developed country and to ensure safe and healthy working conditions, that decision is not one that the manager can feel secure is better than the alternative of running a sweatshop. And if he does feel secure, he is mistaken. If that is the proper conclusion, then those in CSR would be understandably puzzled.

5.3. Counter-examples: In defence of Derrida

As a counter to De George's example – and in defence of a Derridean notion of responsibility – let us consider the example of labour practices and CSR as presented in a *TIME* article, entitled 'Manufacturing: the burden of good intentions' (Power, 2008). This article addresses the issue of whether the same labour standards should be applied the world over. Specifically, it is argued that

the "comply-or-die" model to labour rights and corporate social responsibility can actually hurt workers. This is particularly true for workers in non-Western countries where manufacturers are pushed to develop products at increasing quicker and cheaper rates, whilst still maintaining Western standards of labour practice.

Power (2008) explicitly argues that 'living up to CSR's high-minded ideals is proving extraordinarily hard in countries like China and India that are at the heart of global manufacturing.' He describes how, in the face of increasing global competition, Chinese suppliers set up "five star factories" that comply with international labour standards, but that these factories run alongside "shadow" factories which operate to meet actual (often Western!) order deadlines. Citing Michael Kobori, head of supply chain social and environmental sustainability at Levi Strauss, Power argues that '[t]he craze for auditing has, paradoxically, led factory owners to create such ["shadow"] factories. It also sops up resources that could be channelled toward improving labor conditions.'

Mukhtarul Amin (in Power, 2008), managing director of Superhouse Ltd., an Indian clothing manufacturer with clients such as Esprit and Diesl, candidly states that he, too, cannot meet all his CSR obligations. Some, he says, are too difficult to meet, whereas others are irrelevant for Indian society. One retailer expects of their suppliers to have official documentation of workers ages, but many rural Indians have no such documentation. Acquiring the documentation in an expensive and costly exercise and this eats into company profits. In order to offset these extra costs, companies often engage in shrewd labour practices, such as employing additional short-term workers instead of paying overtime.

In yet another example, managers who refuse to let migrant workers, who wish to return home as soon as possible, work illegal overtime risk losing workers to less stringent factories (Power, 2008). All these examples lead Rosey Hurst, founder of Impactt, an ethical trade NGO based in London, to succinctly summarise the lesson that we can learn from this comparative study: 'The world is a complicated place' (Power, 2008). What these examples show is that context is important for understanding our responsibilities, and that one should be weary of imposing 'universal' notions of CSR on developing economies, since the effects can leave worker worse off, rather than better off.

In contrast with 'universal' definitions, a Derridean notion of responsibility, and of a deconstructive ethics, focuses attention on that which has been relegated to the margins of dominant discourses. In other words, it demands of us to 'reconsider in its totality the metaphysico-anthropocentric

axiomatic[67] that dominates the thought of just and unjust' in the West (Derrida, 1992b: 19). In this sense, Derrida is very cautious of the conceptual nets which De George speaks of, because in deciding how to measure responsibility, or how to assign praise or blame, we 'reproduce, under the guise of describing [a certain ethicality] in its ideal purity, the given ethical conditions of a *given* ethics' (Derrida, 1988a: 122).

This *given* ethics, however, can never be equated with a universal ethics, and doing so excludes certain conditions no less essential to '*this given* ethics or of *another*, or of a law that would not answer to Western concepts of ethics, rights or politics' (122). The task of deconstruction is, therefore, to challenge the 'very concept of responsibility that regulates the justice and appropriateness (*justesse*) of our behaviour, of our theoretical, practical, ethico-political decisions' (Derrida, 1992b: 20). Derrida (1988a: 122) further argues that in employing a deconstructive ethics, we not only draw attention to that which has been excluded, but we also create an opening for thinking anew about responsibility and the concepts related to responsibility (which, for him, include 'property, intentionality, will, freedom, conscience, consciousness, self-consciousness, subject, self, person, community, decision, and so forth' (Derrida, 1992b: 20)). In trying to account for other conditions of responsibility, one might even 'open or recall the opening of another ethics, another right, another "declaration of rights," transformation of constitutions, etc.' (Derrida, 1988a: 122). From the above it is clear that – far from resulting in a relativist position which allows us to say nothing about responsibility – Derrida's deconstruction calls on an increase in responsibility (Derrida, 1992b: 20)!

Again, it is useful to bear in mind the insights gleaned with regard to modelling complex systems (see chap. 3, sec. 6.1.). The descriptions that we accord to our models (including our models of CSR) are contingent on the resources at our disposal, and often reflect our prejudices and biases. As such, these models are unlikely to account for different conceptions of rights and responsibilities. Therefore, the only way in which we can do justice to different ways of being, is to subject our models to critical scrutiny in an attempt to recall the opening of another ethics, of which Derrida

[67] The schema Derrida is referring to here is one which privileges the man over the wife, the child over the animal etc. In this fraternal structure the superior term marks the higher presence, whereas the inferior term marks the fall or weakness. Elsewhere, Derrida calls this schema the 'carno-phallogocentric' structure of subjectivity, in which the self-present, speaking, virile male eater of flesh is installed at the determinative centre of subjectivity (Derrida, 1995b: 280; Calarco, 2004: 190). The common denominator of this schema is the unquestioned assimilation of differences, which informs 'the order of the political, the State, right, or morality' and, therefore, subjectivity itself (Derrida, 1995b: 281). Anyone or anything that is relegated to the margins of this schema (including the celibate, homosexuals, femininity; or, in our example – China, India and Africa) will rarely be acknowledged, admitted to the head of anything (above all to the State or to the head of international bodies), unless somehow it lets itself be translated into this dominant schema. (The above description is modified from Vrba (Woermann), 2006: 77.)

speaks. In other words, ethics demands that we must transgress our current conceptions of CSR, and try to imaginatively seek out other alternatives in an attempt to enlarge our view on responsibility.

De George's attempt to define contextual differences in terms of non-moral responsibilities represents an effort to define a *given* ethics as *the* ethics, or the only way of being. In other words, De George does not take cognisance of the provisional or limited nature of our ethical models. This, of course, is not a new move. In 'Ethics, Institutions, and the Right to Philosophy' Derrida (2002d: 9) states that we should go 'beyond the old, tiresome, worn-out, and wearisome opposition between Eurocentricism and anti-Eurocentricism.' Derrida (9) argues that one way in which to achieve this is to '*take into account and de-limit* the assignation of philosophy to its Greco-European origin or memory.' This neither means that we should reaffirm this history, nor discard of it[68], but that that there must be:

> the active becoming-aware of the fact that philosophy is no longer determined by a program, an originary language or tongue [in De George's terms, 'a common humanity'] whose memory it would suffice to recover so as to discover its destination. Philosophy is no more assigned to its origin or by its origin, than it is simply, spontaneously, or abstractly cosmopolitical or universal…There are other ways for philosophy than those of appropriation or expropriation…Not only are there other ways for philosophy, but philosophy, if there is any such thing, is the other way (Derrida, 2002d: 10).

Being attentive towards different ways of being and philosophising is not a relativist stance, but a modest stance, geared towards openness for otherness. As stated before, Derrida (1999: 78) firmly denies that he is a relativist (if by relativism, we understand a doctrine with its own history of denying absolutes). Derrida concedes that he refuses to reduce differences, but does not understand this to be an example of relativism, but rather an example of discernment. In this regard, he asks:

> Are you a relativist simply because you say, for instance, that the other is the other, and that every other is other than the other?... If I want to pay attention to the singularity of the other, the singularity of the situation, the singularity of language, is that relativism?' (78).

[68] Refer to the first movement of deconstruction explained in chapter four, section 2.2.1.

6. Justice, undecidability, and the relation that constitutes the ethical

6.1. The figure of Hamlet

Refusing to reduce differences means that we should be more vigilant with regard to how we philosophise about CSR and business ethics. Part of being vigilant means accepting that the predicates of responsibility cannot be conclusively decided upon. In other words, as cited by Jones (2007: 526) earlier in the analysis (sec 5.1.), 'responsibility involves undecidability… [which] is the condition of possibility for ethics, politics and justice, and responsibility.' For De George (2008), such an admission does not bring us closer to fulfilling our responsibilities, but instead implies that we are hopeless to act. For him, '[t]he unsettling aspect of the act of deconstruction… is that we seem never to get to an answer, and that whenever we arrive at an answer we are assured that it must be wrong' (82). Given this interpretation, he concludes that a deconstructive mindset 'reduce those in business, who have to make decisions, or their critics, to the position of an undecided Hamlet.'

Ironically, it is exactly the figure of Hamlet that Derrida recalls in the opening pages of *Spectres of Marx*[69]. Of particular interest for Derrida is Hamlet's feeling that 'the time is out of joint'. Critchley (1999b: 156) argues that, in his analysis of Hamlet, Derrida (1994) weaves together Hamlet's experience of disjuncture, with the disjuncture of the ethical relation in Levinas, as well as with Martin Heidegger's meditation on time and justice. According to Critchley (1999b: 156-157), Derrida is attempting to show that the disjuncture, which Heidegger associates with calculative, metaphysical and deconstructive notions of law, cannot be neutralised. Contrary to how Heidegger would have it, there can be no presencing of the present in terms of a jointure or a donation of time, in which we experience the phenomenality of the being of beings as disclosure or unconcealment of what is present. The moment of justice as an event cannot come into presence (be present) in a manner that disrupts the flow of time. The reason for this is that this Heideggerian conception of justice demands absolute symmetry or the revelation of the proper of the other as presence (Derrida, 1994: 27). For Derrida, the moment of justice resides in the disjoint, in the disjuncture of the ethical

[69] In his article 'The end of history, spectres of Marx and business ethics', Kerlin (1998: 1721) states that just as Hamlet curses his fate for being born into a certain time, and for having to do the work of mourning and pay the debts left to him by his spectral father, so too, Marx was haunted by ghosts. Marx's texts are deconstructive in the sense that they show respect for a logic of spectrality. In this regard, Derrida writes that (1994: 92) deconstruction proceeds 'in a certain *spirit of Marxism.'* However, he also argues that Marx wanted to exorcise the phantoms and spectres, in order to free philosophy and consciousness of the illusions (particularly the illusionary spectrality of religion) to which they had been historically subjected, and to bring them back to the world of labour, production and exchange (Critchley, 1999b: 145-146; Derrida, 1994: 170). As such, the Marxist project remains '*pre-deconstructive'* (Derrida, 1994: 170).

relation with the Other. Justice as disjuncture, rather than 'justice under the sign of presence' (27), is the very 'condition for the presencing of the present'. Justice (and, responsible action, as an instance of justice) cannot be assembled into a totality: it can only be experienced in the singularity and asymmetry of the event i.e. in the face-to-face encounter with the Other.

De George (2008:84) argues that Derrida (in appropriating Levinas's understanding of the ethical relation) supports a reforming notion of ethics, which is completely altruistic or other-orientated (and which, as we saw from the previous discussion, is premised on the logic of *chrematistics* or the general economy). De George (2008: 84) contends that '[c]ommutative justice [thus far referred to as an equalising justice], which involves exchanging equals for equals, has no place here'. In other words, De George's contention is that there is no place for the *oikos* or the restricted economy in a Derridean notion of responsibility. Whilst he finds Derrida's radical views on ethics laudable, he argues that it certainly does not constitute our ordinary understanding of ethics. This, he argues, forces us to ask:

> what is the relation that we previously thought constituted the ethical? Do we have to give it up? Do we rename it? Or contrary-wise, why not retain the term 'ethics' for the traditional meaning and call this new reformed relation by some other name, for instance, what is ordinarily thought of as an unconditional relation of love for another? (84)

If Derrida is truly proposing a notion of ethics as an unconditional relation of love to a singular other, one may well ask (along with De George) what such a view could mean for the practice of business ethics generally, and CSR specifically? In other words, the question is: how is ethical action in business possible given the fact that justice and responsibility (as a relation to the Other) remain irreducible, undecidable, and non-subsumptive? In order to show why this characterisation of responsibility does not leave us impotent to act, we turn to a more detailed discussion of Derrida's understanding of justice, law, and action. The discussion proceeds at the hand of his illuminating text entitled: 'Force of Law: "The Mystical Foundation of Authority"' (1992b). This discussion is followed by a response to De George, in which it is argued that heeding to the call of justice does indeed necessitate that one takes cognisance of the undecidability that marks the heart of responsibility, but that this view of justice cannot excuse one from taking action.

6.2. Unpacking Derrida's understanding of justice

Justice, Derrida (1992b: 17), argues is incalculable and 'must always concern singularity, individuals, irreplaceable groups and lives, the other or myself *as* other, in a unique situation.' In contrast to the incalculability of justice, 'law is the element of calculation'; it is the 'rule, norm, value or the imperative of justice which necessarily have a general form' (16; 17). Whereas law is deconstructable, justice is not, which also means that justice is impossible; or, 'an experience of the impossible' (16). This is what Jones (2007) means when he says one can only be responsible if one is not sure whether one has been responsible.

As stated before, De George's (2008: 82) interpretation of this statement is that it seems as if Derrida does not recognise objectively right actions and, therefore, one can never be sure of anything, including whether to judge when a moral risk has paid off or not. De George (83) criticises this viewpoint with reference to the 2005 book *For Business Ethics* by Jones, Parker and ten Bos. He argues that, despite claiming not to know what justice is, Jones and his co-authors can confidently discern between just and unjust actions and 'somehow they, like the rest of us know that stealing from pension funds, false accounting, sweatshop labour, manipulative marketing, and a host of other practices are wrong'. How is it possible to condemn these practices whilst claiming that justice is an experience of the impossible?

For Derrida, justice is a limit concept: it functions as a regulative ideal and thus is 'quasi' or 'ultra-transcendental'. In 'As if it were Possible, "within such limits"...', Derrida (2002b: 354) discusses the role of the quasi-transcendental in his work. On the one hand, the use of the quasi-transcendental is a way of saving the legacy of philosophy, which we cannot do without (including all our metaphysical notions such as the *a priori,* origin, or foundation). On the other hand, however, the quasi-transcendental is a way of 'rethinking the meaning of the "possible," as well as the "impossible," and to do so in terms of the so-called condition of possibility, often shown to be the "condition of impossibility"' (354) (see chap. 4, sec. 3.2.). The status of justice as a quasi-transcendental concept safeguards justice as a regulative ideal by reinscribing it as something that can only take place in a unique situation (the condition of possibility).

Justice can never be encapsulated in a rule or norm (the condition of impossibility). However, justice also needs rules. As Derrida (1999: 72) puts it: 'Justice requires the law. You can't simply call for justice without trying to embody justice in the law.' Therefore, justice demands that we interpret and judge the rules that we apply, each time we apply them. In this regard, Derrida (1992b:

23) writes: 'No exercise of justice as law can be just unless there is a "fresh judgement"', which means that we must take responsibility for the rules that we employ. Justice cannot amount to the application of a rule (a position known in law as 'legal positivism'), since in such circumstances, there is no responsible action. It is useful to think of Derrida's conception of justice as constituting an expression of ethical complexity. Since we cannot understand complexity in its fullness, we are forced to reduce it through modelling. Our models of justice, therefore, constitute law. Although we try to remain faithful to this ethical complexity, law is always a partial and incomplete model of justice, and must, therefore, continually be revised. In the following chapter (sec. 2.2.), the methodological complexity involved in thinking about limit concepts is explained from the viewpoint of open systems, which helps one in thinking through 'the self-contradictory relation of unrevisable separation and permanent provocation' (Teubner, 2001: 42) between limit concepts (such as justice) and immanent concepts (such as law), or between the environment and the system.

If we translate Derrida's discussion of justice and law into the language of business ethics, we can say that ethics and responsible action can never simply be encapsulated in codes and CSR statements. Although business ethics tools are useful in helping us to think through our responsibilities, they cannot be blindly applied. Doing so will result in ethical positivism (which is akin to legal positivism), and which results in a type of procedural ethics that, as argued in chapter one (sec. 4.1.4.), robots can learn and copy (Adorno, 1973). Ethical action (like justice) is only possible when we take responsibility for our decisions. This also means that responsibility must be assumed anew every time a decision is made or an action taken. Responsibility (like justice) is, therefore singular, and is something that manifests in the event.

6.3. A Derridean response to De George

From the above we can deduce that De George (2008: 84) is correct in stating that for Derrida, 'one cannot simply be following a rule'. One has to *choose* whether to follow the rule or not. De George (84), however, argues that this account of responsible action is at odds with the phenomenology of our moral experience, and for this reason he supports an Aristotelian analysis, where one acts virtuously because one has developed the habit of acting virtuously. The difference between De George and Derrida is, therefore, that, for the former, responsible action is embodied in the rule (which we, as moral agents, then freely apply); whereas for the latter responsible action resides in the choice or decision of whether to follow the rule or not.

Although De George does not spell out the reasons for why merely following the rule accords better with our moral experiences, the answer presumably lies in some argument pertaining to our common human morality and our bounded rationality. But, it is precisely because we are boundedly rational, and because the world is a determinate place, that we have to go through what Derrida (1999: 66) calls 'the terrible process of undecidability'. Derrida's treatment of the question of 'undecidability' (which so many of his critics confuse with 'indeterminacy') amounts to an acknowledgement of our limitations and of our inability to reconcile conflicting demands, rather than paralysis when faced with a decision. Derrida writes that those critics who charge him with saying that the text means anything[70], usually betray an anxiety with regard to the fact that 'texts *may* call for interpretation… there may be some complication in a text' (79). With regard to the text (and, therefore, also with regard to context, and differences in and between contexts) Derrida (79) writes:

> I would say that the text is complicated, there are many meanings struggling with one another, there are tensions, there are overdeterminations, there are equivocations; but this doesn't mean that there is indeterminacy. On the contrary, there is too much determinacy. That is the problem.

We experience undecidability when confronted with a problem where 'I know that the two determined solutions are as justifiable as one another' and I must make a decision which is 'heterogeneous to the space of knowledge' (66). Real choice (and hence, autonomy) is, therefore, always constrained by what Morin (2008) calls the hazards of existence. As will be described in more detail in the following chapter (sec. 4.2.2.), autonomy should be conceived 'not in opposition to, but in complementarity with, the idea of dependence' (114). Complexity is the outcome of freedom and structure (see chap. 3, sec. 5.2.2.), and it is these elements that, together, constitute the process of undecidability, which guards against the decision being reduced to the mere application of a rule.

Derrida (1999: 66) states that '[e]thics and politics, therefore, starts with undecidability.' The ethical moment, is the precise moment where, after I have 'prepared as far as possible by knowledge, by information, by infinite analysis' (66) I must go beyond knowledge, and act[71]. For

[70] In this regard, consider again de George's (2008: 82) interpretation of a deconstructive notion of responsibility: 'It is not clear that Derrida recognizes any objectively right action, and hence one is always unsure because there is nothing to be sure about.'

[71] Derrida (1999: 67) warns that it is never 'I' who acts, but rather the other in me who must make the decision, because 'as soon as I know that 'I' am the master of my decision, I am claiming that I know what to do and that everything depends on my knowledge, which in turn cancels the decision.'

this reason, the distinction between good and evil (i.e. ethics) cannot depend on knowledge: 'we should not know, in terms of knowledge, what is the distinction between good and evil' (66). Returning to the figure of Hamlet in *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida writes: 'if we assume that Hamlet is a figure of paralysis or neurosis because of undecidability, he might also be a paradigm for action: he understands what actions should be and he undergoes the process of undecidability at the beginning' (68). The cybernetician, Hans von Foerster (1990), makes a similar point in his discussion on undecidable questions (see chap. 6, sec. 4.2.2.), stating that '[o]nly those questions that are in principle undecidable, we can decide' (italicised in the original).

Therefore, to reiterate: in order for there to be an ethical relation, a decision must be taken. We cannot just follow a rule or a programme. In response to De George's questions posed at the end of section 6.1.[72], one can argue that the confrontation with the Other (as a moment of decision and of justice) is the ethical relation, and that which is traditionally thought to constitute the ethical (i.e. a commutative or equalising conception of 'justice') are the rules, norms, and calculations that precede the ethical moment. We, therefore, need give nothing up (as De George maintains), for, as Derrida argues, calculation is necessary; law is necessary; substantive ethical theories are necessary; but, these tools can never *give* us ethics. Decision and judgement is needed for responsible action to occur. Responsibility means *assuming* responsibility and taking a decision in the face of the undecidable.

7. Judging action and taking action[73]

Two questions arise from Derrida's description of the terrible process of undecidability: firstly, if our decisions can only be undertaken beyond knowledge, how can we judge the truth of our decisions? For De George (2008:84) the 'Derridean' answer to this question is that we can't because '[n]either a corporation's actions nor the actions of individuals acting for a corporation fall under any ethical rules'.

Secondly, how are we to understand ethics and politics, especially given Derrida's Levinasian understanding of responsibility? Here, De George (82) specifically argues that the ethical relation (typified by the meeting with the singular Other) cannot readily be applied to a business context.

[72] The question referred to is the following: 'What is the relation that we previously thought constituted the ethical? Do we have to give it up? Do we rename it? Or contrary-wise, why not retain the term 'ethics' for the traditional meaning and call this new reformed relation by some other name, for instance, what is ordinarily thought of as an unconditional relation of love for another? (De George, 2008: 84).

[73] See chapter six, section 2.1. for a more in depth discussion on the possibility of ethical judgement and action.

The reason for this is that the Levinasian view of responsible is applicable only between individuals, and that '[t]he task of CSR is a different task, namely influencing those in business to act in a way that is more positive in its effects on human beings, on the environment, on the common good than is often the case' (82). De George's argument is that if the ethical relation is constituted by the meeting with the singular other, then the term business ethics becomes an oxymoron (84). This is because the ethical relation is incompatible with the logic of organisations, defined as profit-seeking entities.

If De George's responses to these two questions do indeed constitute a valid interpretation and critique of the Derridean perspective, then he is right in claiming that Derrida's ideas hold limited applicability to business. For this reason, it is necessary to turn to what Derrida has to say about these two issues. In the sections to follow, it will firstly be shown that although a deconstructive ethics confronts us with a modest position, this certainly does not mean that our evaluation of decisions and actions are not subject to rules, standards, or norms. Rather, the point is merely that these evaluative categories cannot be exhausted in terms of their conceptual content. Secondly, it will be argued that the ethical relation with the singular Other is always interrupted by a third. In practice, the ethical relation is always accompanied by a political dimension, which disrupts the ethical moment, and which demands business strategy and institutionalisation. As such, both De George's criticisms are overcome.

7.1. 'This definition of the deconstructionist is false… and feeble'[74]

With regard to the first question (namely, how can we judge the truth of our decisions?), De George interprets Derrida's focus on individual judgement (as a necessary condition for ethics) as an argument against rules[75]. However, such an interpretation relies on a misreading of Derrida. In response to this line of critique, Derrida argues that we need laws, rules, and norms. In fact, the deconstructable nature of law is exactly that which gives meaning to law or to our concepts (moral or otherwise). Concerning the structural conditions of concepts, Derrida (1988a: 117) writes: 'Every concept that lays claim to any rigor whatsoever implies the alternative of "all or nothing."… It is impossible or illegitimate to form a *philosophical concept* outside this logic of all or nothing.' In other words, every time I utter a word or a phrase, I do so at the exclusion of all other words and phrases. Even vague statistical approaches cannot overcome this problem: relativism (as a concept)

[74] Derrida, 1988a: 146.
[75] In this regard, consider the following statement: 'Because [Derrida] questions foundationalism in any aspect of thought, he questions the foundations of morality… Yet how we as individuals or as a society or as the totality of humankind are to think about and decide upon what is right and what is wrong, and what these terms mean, remain problematic' (De George, 2008: 83).

is just as determinate in its logic as absolutism (as concept) is. This is the nature of conceptual language: it is determined by rules and laws, and moreover, Derrida uses this example to show that the law is often enabling: we *need* law. '[T]he essence of law is not necessarily tied to negativity (prohibition, repression, etc.)'[76] (133).

However, the task of deconstruction is to *challenge* law in the name of justice and ethics. This is also not to say that our challenge to concepts of law, social responsibility, or business ethics cannot be a strong challenge. Derrida is quite clear in stating that deconstruction does not claim that there is no better or worse. In this context, consider the following citation, also taken from the 'Afterword' (146), where Derrida responds to his critics' charge of relativism:

> For of course there's a "right track' [*une "bonne voie"*], a better way, and let it be said in passing how surprised I have often been, how amused or discouraged, depending on my humour, by the use or abuse of the following argument: Since the deconstructionist (which is to say, isn't it, the sceptical-relativist-nihilist!) is supposed not to believe in truth, stability, or the unity of meaning, in intention or "meaning-to-say," how can he demand of us that we read *him* with pertinence, precision, rigor? How can he demand of us that his text be interpreted correctly? How can he accuse anyone else of having misunderstood, simplified, deformed it, etc.? In other words, how can he discuss, and discuss the reading of what he writes? The answer is simple enough: this definition of the deconstructionist is *false* (that's right: false, not true) and feeble; it supposes a bad (that's right: bad, not good) and feeble reading of numerous texts, first of all mine, which therefore must finally be read or reread. Then perhaps it will be understood that the power and truth (and all those values associated with it) is never contested or destroyed in my writings, but only reinscribed in more powerful, larger, more stratified contexts. And within interpretative contexts… that are relatively stable, sometimes apparently unshakable, it should be possible to invoke rules of competence, criteria of discussion and of consensus, good faith, lucidity, rigor, criticism and pedagogy.

This citation has been quoted at length in order to again make it clear that Derrida is not against rules, standards or norms. He merely wishes to challenge these rules and norms, in order to reinscribe truth in 'more powerful, larger and more stratified contexts'. The deconstructionist is, therefore, intimately involved with truth, which Derrida (1999: 77) defines as 'the quality of a statement, a judgement or an intuition related to something which you might call a fact, but truth is not reality'. The search for a better truth is not a search for absolutes or a pure science, but a way of

[76] In this regard, Derrida (1988a: 132) offers the example of a traffic light: 'A red light is not repressive.'

taking into account difference (79), or with 'negotiating with alterity' (Wood, 1999: 109). In this regard, the Derridean scholar, David Wood (110) writes that 'deconstruction "itself" and, indeed, the concept of "responsibility," to which Jacques Derrida has recently given so much weight, are each nothing *other* than experience regained. Deconstruction is, if you like, the experience of experience.'

In this sense, Derrida's project – which focuses on different (better) ways of being – is at odds with De George's way of doing business ethics, which is essentially a way of downplaying differences in the name of a common ethical experience, or a common moral foundation. Derrida (1999: 74) readily admits that his is a 'poor work' when it comes to spelling out 'this is what you have to know' or 'this is what you have to do'. But the important point to understand here is that this does not imply that we can't know or do anything. Wood (1999: 105) confirms this when he writes that '[w]e owe to concepts like "justice," "rights," "duty," "virtue," "good," "responsibility," and "obligation," our capacity for ethical judgement' but warns that 'the work of clarifying and codifying the scope and significance of these terms is the source of another danger – the calculation of our responsibility, in which the ethical as an openness to the incalculable is extinguished.'

To guard against this, we must deconstruct and employ the logic of terms such as *différance*, iterability, supplement etc. We do this not in the name of relativism or indeterminacy, but in the name of ethics, and when we do this, Derrida (1988a: 117) argues that 'it is *better* to make explicit in the most conceptual, rigorous, formalizing, and pedagogical manner possible the reasons one has for doing so, for thus changing the rules and the contexts of discourse.'

7.2. The *aporia* of hospitality: the interplay of infinite vigilance and urgent action

To deconstruct in the name of the ethics, also means to deconstruct in the name of someone. This is the double-logic of pure hospitality, which consists in:

> welcoming whoever arrives before imposing any conditions on him, before knowing and asking anything at all, be it a name or an identity 'paper'. But it supposes also that one address him, singularly, that he be called therefore, and that he be understood to have a proper name: "You, what is your name?"' (Derrida, 2005: 7).

As we have seen, the second part of this double movement – i.e. addressing the singular other – presents a problem for business ethics. How can those who practice business ethics (and aim to

ensure that business has good effects on others) account for the singular other? In De George's (2008: 84) words: 'Speaking of a corporation opening itself up to the Other makes little sense.'

In order to explore this question, let us return to Derrida's understanding of justice (as responsibility for, and to, the singular Other). We take, as a starting point, Critchley's (1999b: 83-105) chapter on deconstruction and pragmatism, in which he questions whether Derrida is a private ironist or a public liberal[77]. Richard Rorty (1989) argues that despite attempts by Platonists, Christians, Marxists, and Kantians to reconcile the private and public domains, they remain theoretically irreconcilable. In other words – and as an example – self-actualisation, self-interest, and personal autonomy are fundamentally incompatible with justice, charity, and love for one's neighbour (Critchley, 1999b: 85). Whereas the ironist 'faces up to the contingency of their most central beliefs and desires', the liberal is someone who is appalled by human suffering and cruelty. The heroine, for Rorty, is the figure of the liberal ironist: 'someone who is committed to social justice and appalled by cruelty, but who recognizes that there is no metaphysical foundation to her concern for justice' (85).

Critchley's (1999b: 98) hypothesis is that if we accept Rorty's definition of the public domain and if 'deconstruction is ethical in the peculiarly Levinasian sense… then deconstruction would be concerned with the suffering of other human beings and would therefore qualify as public by Rorty's criteria.' In other words, it is precisely *because* deconstruction is concerned with the irreducibility of the ethical relation that it has significant practical consequences[78]. Critchley, however, argues that Derrida understands justice in an ethical (as opposed to a political) sense, but that this understanding doesn't make justice apolitical. To explain this, it is necessary to follow Critchley (99) in his analysis of the Levinasian understanding of justice.

In *Totalité et Infini,* justice functions as a synonym for ethics, understood as '*la relation avec autrui'* (the relation with the other) (Levinas, 1990: 62). It is this specific understanding of justice that Derrida (1992b: 22) refers to in 'Force of Law'. However, in his later works, Levinas differentiates between this understanding of justice and justice as distinguished from the ethical

[77] The categories of 'private ironist' and 'public liberal' are used by Richard Rorty (1989) to designate the private and public spheres.

[78] Although Critchley (1999b) makes a convincing argument, which has interesting implications for this analysis, it is doubtful that Derrida would accept the distinctions that Rorty employs. In 'Negotiations', Derrida (2002a: 31) explicitly states that 'I do not believe in the radical distinction between public and private.' In speaking of negotiation (which is intimately tied to deconstruction (16)) Derrida (17) writes:

> Negotiation is constantly in a state of micro-transformation. *Every day:* this means it does not stop. This also means that between politics – that is, public life – and private life (interests, desires, etc.) the communication is never broken. I do not believe in the conceptual value of a rigorous distinction between the private and the public... In what I write one should be able to perceive that the boundary between the autobiographical and the political is subject to a certain strain.

relation. Critchley (1999b: 100) paraphrases Levinas's understanding of justice in *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (1974) as a question that 'arises when a third party arrives on the scene, obliging one to choose between competing ethical claims and reminding one that the ethical relation is always already situated in a specific socio-political context.' The reason why Critchley claims that Derrida accepts an ethical (as opposed to political) notion of justice is because, for Derrida, the experience of justice (or ethics) cannot be encapsulated in law. Justice is the moment of the decision, or, following Søren Kierkegaard, the madness of the decision (Derrida, 1992b: 26). However, once the decision is made and the action undertaken, we enter into the realm of politics (which is also the realm of the institution, law or policy).

In 'Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility', Derrida (1999: 68-69) elaborates on his understanding of the ethical relation. He argues that the face of the third does not appear after the confrontation with the face of the Other. The face of the third 'is already involved in the face to face relation as a call for justice.' The face of the third destroys the asymmetrical, but dual, relation that I experience in my confrontation with the Other. This forces me to abandon my unconditional concerns for the Other and engage in comparison and rationality (in other words, I must return to calculation). However, no amount of calculation can resolve this *aporia*. In the moment of the decision, I have to pass beyond knowledge. The ethical relation, therefore, means that 'I have a relation to the other in his/her singularity or uniqueness, and at the same time the third one is already in place. The second one is a third one. 'You are a third one', that is the condition of justice' (69). On this reading, it is not a matter of choosing between an ethical and a political notion of justice. For justice to take place, I must be both ethical and political, even though I destroy the very conditions of justice in the moment of justice; or, in the words of Spivak (1994: 22): 'Responsibility annuls the call to which it seeks to respond.'

This implies that De George's concern that Derrida collapse ethics into a unconditional, but impotent, relation of love for the other is invalid, because the third always intervenes, thereby politicising the ethical. The implication that this holds for our understanding of CSR is that we have to grapple with the contesting and irreconcilable demands of stakeholder groups – each of which make unique and singular claims upon the organisation. However, we cannot grapple with these claims indefinitely. At some point, management must decide (and decide as responsibly as possible) which claims will be honoured and how – even though this decision might constitute a denial of other claimants' demands. This is the impossible nature of ethics and politics. Even if we acknowledge that value judgements and choices are involved in our decisions, this acknowledgement is not enough to guarantee that good will come from what we do, for the simple

reason that we do not carry full knowledge of the complexity of the situation (Preiser & Cilliers, 2010: 269).

In 'Ethics and Politics Today', Derrida (2002e: 296; 302) identifies the following determinants of ethics and politics: firstly, ethical and political responsibility commands action. Secondly, both demand a thoughtful answer to the question 'What should I do?' – A questioning without limit (which implies vigilance to the question). Thirdly, both ethics and politics demand that we make the decision with the utmost urgency and haste. The time of reflection is always interrupted by a situation. In short, the relation between a here and now are the common requisites of both ethics and politics. The double-bind of ethics and politics is, therefore, not urgency against non-urgency, but urgency against urgency (300). This double-bind also provides the impetus for the critical enterprise. It is precisely because we have to act despite the complexity, that the critical task is so important.

In 'Negotiations', Derrida (2002a: 29) states that the infinite task of deconstruction, as negotiation, is 'a work of mediation... a to-and-fro between impatience and patience.' Here, impatience and patience are synonyms for urgency and vigilance, and Derrida warns that we need both – not in small measures, but we need them absolutely. Hence, vigilance/urgency and patience/impatience represents another *aporia* or double-bind, which we cannot do without. Spivak (1994: 26) sums up this point as follows: responsible thought describes responsibility – 'caught in a question necessarily begged in action' – as attending the call of the irreducible contamination of responsibility. Deconstruction positions itself in the fold of this *aporia*, or between, what Derrida (2002a: 25) call earlier on in this text, 'affirmation' and 'position'. It is also here that we find one of Derrida's strongest calls for political action:

> One must not be content with affirmation. One needs position. That is, one must create institutions. Therefore, one needs position. One needs a stance. Thus, negotiation, at this particular moment, does not simply take place between affirmation and negation, position and negation: it takes place between affirmation and position, because the position threatens the affirmation. That is to say that in itself institutionalization in its very success threatens the movement of unconditional affirmation. And yet this needs to happen, for if the affirmation were content to... wash its hand of the institution in order to remain at a distance, in order to say, "I affirm, and then the rest is of no interest to me, the institutions does not interest me... let the other take care of that," them this affirmation would deny itself, it would not be an affirmation. *Any affirmation, any promise in its very structure requires its*

fulfilment. Affirmation requires a position. It requires that one move to action and that one do something, even if it is imperfect (25-26; my italics).

De George's concern is that in attending to the call of the Other, a Derridean notion of responsibility cannot further the task of CSR, which (to his mind) is to act in a way that is more positive in its effects on human beings, on the environment, and on the common good than is often the case. However, what the above discussion implies in that, in order to serve the good (the *common* good) we cannot escape this singularity, even though the singularity is always transgressed by a situation. De George is correct in thinking that Derrida expects the impossible, because, in order for an event to take place or to be possible – in order for there to be something like responsibility – it has to be 'the coming of the impossible' (Derrida, 2002b: 361). The im-possiblity of possibility is not only negative or dialectical; rather, as Derrida (361) qualifies, 'it *introduces* the possible; it is its *gatekeeper today*.'

Wood's (1999: 117) understanding of Derrida's notion of responsibility sheds light on the meaning of this last statement: responsibility 'is not quantifiable (or even inquantifiably) *large* and, therefore, not a basis of guilt through failure to live up to it. It is rather a recursive modality, an always renewable openness.' Here again, we can refer back to the critical enterprise. Since we do not have a bird's eye view on reality, we need to continually engage with complexity, take cognisance of our models, and acknowledge when these models are in need of revision and transformation. To reiterate the words of Preiser and Cilliers (2010: 274): 'The ethics of complexity is thus radically or perpetually ethical.' De George's (2008: 84) objects that Derrida's view of responsibility means that companies must 'open themselves up to hospitality and risk being taken advantage of by anyone who chooses to do so.' To this we can respond with Wood's (1999: 117) words: 'Openness does not require that one leaves the door open, but that one is always willing to open the door. Responsibility then is the experience of that openness.' A Derridean notion of responsibility, therefore, corresponds with the normative implications of critical complexity, which – to recall (Preiser & Cilliers, 2010: 274) – 'tells us that ethics will be involved, but does not tell us what that ethics actually entails.'

8. Corporate social responsibility in practice: the timely relevance of Jacques Derrida

In this final section, a summary is provided of the major arguments presented in this chapter, in order to show why Derrida does indeed introduce new categories that can be applied to CSR and to business ethics. Moreover, it will be shown why these categories are more effective in helping us to

navigate through some of the issues that arise in the context of CSR. The complexity-points, which were alluded to during the course of this chapter, and which will be expounded upon in the next chapter, are also briefly mentioned in this section. The section proceeds with summaries of the main objections against a deconstructive ethics that were presented in this chapter, each of which is then briefly responded to.

i) Derrida's philosophy would hold more appeal for business ethicists and practitioners if his texts stated clearly what they mean, and if he presented clear arguments in support of his claims.

In response to this type of question, Derrida writes (1988a:119): 'If things were simple, word would've gotten around'. Derrida warns against those who wish to simplify at all costs. He calls such people 'dangerous dogmatists and tedious obscurantists' (119). In chapter two, Cilliers (2005) was quoted as saying that if we accept the fact that the world is complex, then we need to demonstrate the difficulties that we are in, also in the way in which we talk about them. To fail to do so is not only a technical failure, but also a moral failure. Technically-speaking, language is constituted by the dynamic play of differences, which gives rise to complexity, implying that no matter how hard we try, we cannot completely map-out meaning. Morally-speaking, this means that we cannot fully control the meaning of our utterances, nor account for differences excluded from our specific, limited, and, hence, violent positions.

Taking cognisance of complexity, therefore, demands that we engage with the limitations and consequences of our concepts and paradigms, including the paradigm of CSR. CSR is a complex phenomenon, as demonstrated by Jones's (2007) assertion that the current and urgent global struggles is testimony of the fact that we do not know what it might mean to live or work in a free economy or society. One way to acknowledge the trouble that we are in is through our discourse, even though this discourse is itself impure and impregnated with some of the most difficult and pressing ethico-political questions of our times, as will be discussed in chapter six (sec. 3.2.).

ii) Derrida's writings are so puzzling and confusing that they are unlikely to add to the debate on CSR, which is currently characterised by arguments which have been developed along historical, justificatory, and critical lines.

Despite the amount of scholarship dedicated to developing our notions of CSR, there is still little clarity on what CSR *should* entail. This is confirmed by De George's (2008: 83) statement that '[t]o

the extent that it has had any success in improving the lot of human beings, CSR is a positive force in the business arena, even if poorly understood by its practitioners, even if rife with irresolvable conflicts, and even if it is always under the process of deconstructing itself.' Instead of applauding our successes and continuing on the same trajectory, it is time (now more so then ever before) to move beyond our current conceptions of CSR in a bid to reinscribe our understanding of CSR in larger, more powerful, and more stratified contexts (Derrida, 1988a), in an attempt to move towards a better future. Derrida's deconstructive ethics goes a long way towards providing us with tools for achieving this goal. In the next chapter, the idea of transgressing current modes of thinking, whilst simultaneously remaining critical of the provisionality of one's own position is elaborated upon.

iii) If Derridean scholars advocate reinscribing CSR in a manner that requires us to accept formulations such as 'one is only responsible when one is not sure if one is being responsible'; 'responsibility involves undecidability'; or, 'ethics is the experience of the impossible', then business practitioners are in danger of developing an 'anything goes' approach to their corporate social responsibilities.

Derrida is not against employing ethical tools (including codes, normative theories, and governance reports – all of which advance responsible corporate actions). His concern is that an over-reliance on business ethics tools can numb the moral impulse to the extent that one forgets that ethics demands decision-making, and that each decision must be taken anew to account for the specificity of the situation. Derrida (1999) is not for relativism; rather, he is against conceptions of ethics that close us off to other ways of being. This represents a modest perspective, the importance of which is well-illustrated in the example of labour practices (Power, 2008) mentioned earlier in the analysis (see sec. 5.3.). In this regard, it is useful to also mention the case of Enron. Enron was awarded by the business community for its ethical behaviour and full compliance with all their explicit ethical requirements (Sims & Brinkmann, 2003: 243). Here are two good examples for why ethical tools cannot replace judgement. Responsibility cannot be embodied in a rule otherwise CSR is reduced to an expression of ethical positivism.

In order to be ethical one must assume responsibility for one's decisions, even when this means confronting certain difficult choices, where no single option presents one with the 'correct' choice. Hence, the characterisation of ethics as an experience of the impossible: ethics can only ever find its expression in the irreducible singularity that characterises the moment of the decision. This, as will be illustrated in chapter six, is no easy feat, since ethics and responsibility not only require self-awareness, vigilance, and innovation in thought and action, but also mutual acceptance, trust, and

tolerance of viewpoints other than one's own. These virtues are typically the character traits embodied by those who realise that rules cannot account for all the different possibilities of what it means to be human.

iv) *If ethical decision-making demands that one confronts the insolvable* impasse*, which characterise the moment of the decision, it is likely that the decision-maker will be reduced to an 'undecided Hamlet'.*

The ethical moment, on a Derridean interpretation, is characterised by asymmetry. If we cannot assimilate the other into our existing frames of meaning, then the ethical moment will involve a measure of disjuncture and undecidability. But such a moment is also the moment of vigilance. In today's global world, our actions have far-reaching effects, many of which can only be determined retrospectively. Yet, in acting, we are also responsible for the consequences that our decisions have for distant and unseen stakeholders. To limit the notion of responsibility to only account for those who are well-represented in our conceptual schema, is to ignore all those who fall to the margins of the dominant discourse. This includes those disenfranchised stakeholders who do not necessarily have the economic clout or the social support systems to make their voices heard. As such, the over-determinations (i.e. the tensions and the competing interests) with which we have to grapple in order to be responsible, call for interpretation and imagination. A measure of undecidability is essential for ethical decision-making. In this sense, Derrida (1999) argues that Hamlet is the paradigm for action, because he understands what actions should be and goes through the process of undecidability. However, it must also be noted that undecidability can never be used as an argument for inaction. A similar argument will be made in the next chapter, at the hand of an analysis of the cybernetician, von Foerster's, undecidable questions. With the help of Morin, it will also be shown why structure and constraints are necessary for exercising freedom and choice; and, hence, for deciding on undecidable questions.

v) *If actions can only be taken beyond the certainty gained from knowledge it is impossible to judge the effectiveness of these actions.*

Deconstruction, as stated before, is not against calculation. Before making any decisions we need to consider our moral tradition, including our concepts of justice, right, virtue, the good, and responsibility (Wood, 1999). However, reflecting on these concepts is not enough. We need to challenge these concepts, with the aim of finding a 'better' way forward. In other words, we need to be led by the regulative ideal of justice. Challenging the status quo also implies a measure of risk,

because in going against tradition, we are negotiating with alterity and the unknown. This is why we must provide rigorous and clear arguments for changing the rules of the discourse (Derrida, 1988a).

This point is particularly poignant in the context of the larger sustainability issues that we face today, which are also related to good corporate social responsibility practices. We are far from clear on how to proceed in the face of problems such as global warming, food security, financial security, or even infectious disease outbreaks. In this regard, the top management of big companies (including oil and gas companies, NGOs, banks, and pharmaceuticals) might benefit from Derrida's ideas, even though these ideas cannot provide them with substantive answers, regarding the best way forward. Once again, complexity theory, which, as mentioned earlier, is characterised by a radical or perpetual ethics (Prieser & Cilliers, 2010), can help us to think more clearly through the implications of this point. In chapter seven (sec. 4), a complex understanding of sustainable development will be presented.

vi) If one accepts that the ethical relationship is non-subsumptive, and if one accepts that the goal is to transgress existing frames of meaning, then the ethical decision-maker is likely to be left powerless in the face of action.

Derrida (2002e; 2002a) is explicit about the fact that the infinite vigilance, which is demanded by ethical reflection, must always be interrupted by action. Ethics requires action, and moreover, urgent action. In other words, ethics without politics is impotent. We need position, we need to take a stance, and in so doing, to create institutions. However, the moment we create institutions is also the moment that we close ourselves off to the very alterity that we seek to safeguard. This is why we must always deconstruct anew (which is in itself a critical task). As Wood (1999) explains, our responsibility is not infinitely large, it is a recursive modality: an always renewable openness. What this implies is that CSR is as much a matter of signing off on policies and codes as it is of challenging these policies and codes. In other words, the complexity of the problem has to be constantly thought anew.

9. Conclusion

The British government recently ran an advertisement campaign to encourage the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions in households[79]. The campaign featured a father reading a bedtime story to his little daughter, in which the potential future consequences of global warming were illustrated.

[79] See: http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2009/oct/16/complaints-government-climate-change-ad

The consequences that featured in the bedtime story included temperature changes, which would result in heat waves and floods; and the possible disappearance of places, due to rising sea levels. The advertisement also stated that 40% of carbon dioxide emissions were caused by households (specifically heating and fuel consumption). The advertisement concluded with the little girl asking her father whether the story has a happy ending, and the punchline was that it is up to us how the story ends.

In an article that appeared in *The Guardian*, it was reported that the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) had received over two hundred complaints about the advertisement in the space of one week. Amongst the most popular reasons for the complaints were the claims that 'there is no scientific evidence of climate change' and that 'there is a division of scientific opinion on this issue and therefore the ad should not have attributed global warming to human activity' (Sweney, 2009). It is doubtful whether the British would outright object to the government dealing with the issue of climate change, since this issue may potentially impact on intergenerational welfare. Judging by the outrage, the *manner* in which the government went about dealing with the problem is, however, objectionable. The general opinion seems to be that – since we do not have clarity on what the consequences of global warming will be (or even whether climate change is a reality) – it is irresponsible and unethical to promote opinions as facts.

What this example illustrates is that our current scientific and business ethics tools are inadequate in helping us to navigate our way through the complexities presented by issues such as climate change. In terms of CSR, we can conclude that – given the problems currently topping the global agenda – CSR cannot be limited to drawing up policies against fraud, deception, or discrimination (all of which can be quite well circumscribed in a utilitarian, virtue, or rights-based framework). Assuming responsibility also means dealing with the uncertainties and complexities that confront the world today. Given the fact that we do not know how the story is going to end, a Derridean framework for CSR, which actively engages with this complexity, is a more robust and better-suited model for dealing with our problems than is a notion of CSR, which is premised on common human and individual moral experiences.

In this chapter it was argued that a complex, critical ethics, such as deconstruction, presents a better model for thinking about business ethics problems. In the following two chapters, the insights gleaned in part II of this study will be fleshed out in terms of the implications that such insights

hold for characterising a complex ethics (chapter six); as well as for thinking about prominent business ethics themes[80], and for teaching business ethics (chapter seven).

[80] It is worthwhile noting that one of the business ethics themes to be addressed in chapter seven is CSR. During the course of this analysis, emphasis will be placed on the specific responsibilities of boards and organisational members, as well as on how these responsibilities can, in principle, be met. Therefore, whereas the aim of the current chapter was to make the case for a critical and complex notion of CSR, the aim of the analysis undertaken in chapter seven is to provide substantive points on what such a notion of CSR entails, practically-speaking.

Part III:
Implications

Chapter 6:
Theoretical Implications: Circumscribing a Complex Ethics

1. Introduction

At this juncture, it should be clear that a complex notion of ethics exposes, challenges, and problematises 'the underlying assumptions that inform conventional theories and practices' (Preiser & Cilliers, 2010: 276). In this penultimate chapter, we return to the introductory comments made at the end of chapter three regarding the ethics of critical complexity, in order to provide a more substantive argument for *what* a complex ethics might entail. In order to elaborate on the premises of a complex ethics, this chapter draws heavily on the insights gleaned from a deconstructive ethics (which, as previously argued, constitutes a good example of a complex ethics).

In chapter three (sec. 6.1.), it was argued that, in order to undertake meaningful actions, we must model complex systems (i.e. we must reduce the complexity). If ethics is also a complex phenomenon, this insights holds important implications for how we view our ethical models. In the next section, it will be shown that our view of ethical models can lead to either ethical impotence, or promote ethical and political action. It is argued that the latter view of ethics – in which our ethical models are conceptualised as quasi-open systems – leads to a more productive reading of ethics. Within this view, one is still able to call upon limit or ideal concepts, such as justice, even though these concepts can never fully manifest in our models. Since our ethical models are neither solipsistic nor complete, ethical knowledge constitutes embedded and partial knowledge. In the second section, the implications of our limited understanding of ethics are explored in terms of what it means to be human, and how we view ourselves as humans (see chap. 3, sec. 6.2.). Part of what it means to be human, is to acknowledge what von Foerster (1990) calls the existence of undecidable questions (that is, questions with no right answers); to acknowledge the freedom and constraints in which we operate; and, to acknowledge the constitutive choices with which we are faced. In the third section, these acknowledgements are explored at the hand of a complex notion of ethics, which also implies a critical and provisional understanding of ethics (since there are no 'right answers'). The implications that the critical task holds for our understanding of ethics is investigated at the hand of the three characteristics of the critical enterprise, namely that such an enterprise is transgressive in nature, and requires irony and imagination (Preiser & Cilliers, 2010: 283; see chap. 3, sec. 6.3.).

The outcome of this analysis is to determine the substantive challenge that a complex ethics holds for our traditional understanding of ethical values such as moral responsibility and awareness, tolerance and openness, moral decision-making and strategy, and reciprocity. Again, it must be noted that, because a complex ethics is both case-specific, and process-orientated, it is difficult to provide firm principles or rules that, together, constitute the ethics of complexity. However, in reinscribing some of our traditional moral values in terms of the implications of a complex ethics, the reader will hopefully gain a sense of what the ethics of complexity entails. In the concluding chapter, the importance of these values will be illustrated in reference to a complex understanding of prominent business ethics themes, such as corporate citizenship/corporate social responsibility, responsible leadership, and sustainability.

2. Modelling and the possibility of knowing the ethical

In chapter two (sec. 6.1.), it was argued that, in order to be ethical, we need to take cognisance of the limits of our conceptual models. Not only are our models of complex phenomena necessarily partial and incomplete, but they are also the product of judgement and convenience. How we frame our models is also largely contingent upon the resources at our disposal. This means that the boundaries of our models are as much the outcome of reflexive processes, as they are of empirical observation regarding the activity of the system. It stands to reason that the more abstract the phenomena that we try to model, the more reflexive processes will impact upon our models, since we often only have our own intellectual resources to rely on in trying to understand these phenomena. This causes additional challenges, which need to be taken into account when reflecting on these models. In this section, the implications that reflexivity hold for the status of our ethical models will be investigated at the hand of both an operationally-closed and an open view of ethical models.

2.1. Ethical models, reflexivity, and operational-closure

As argued in chapter three (sec. 2.1.2.), the cybernetician, Hans von Foerster, ushered in the second-wave of cybernetics by focusing on, and exploring the implications of reflexivity for our understanding of systems. In a talk given in 1990, von Foerster returns to the implications that reflexivity holds; however, in this context, he focuses on the consequences for ethics (not for scientific knowledge). Von Foerster (1990) notes that, for many, acknowledging reflexivity in scientific practices 'is like having the cloven-hoofed foot of the Devil stuck in the door of orthodoxy', and argues that the same holds true in the case of ethics. A first important distinction

can, therefore, be made between ethicists who concede to the fact that we are implicated in our ethical models (i.e. that account for reflexivity) and ethicists who view our ethical models as corresponding with some ideal, Platonic realm. Von Foerster (1990) explains as follows the epistemological shift that occurs when we move from considering ourselves as independent observers who watch the world go by, to seeing ourselves as actors participating in the drama of mutual interaction:

> In the first case, because of my independence, I can tell others how to think and to act: "Thou shalt…," "Thou shalt not…": This is the origin of moral codes. In the second case, because of my interdependence, I can only tell to myself how to think and to act: 'I shall…," "I shall not…"
> This is the origin of ethics.

The insight that our interdependent relations have an impact on our understanding of ethics is not new to this analysis: indeed, in chapter 2 (sec. 6.2.) it was argued (following Cilliers, de Villiers and Roodt (2002)) that our ethical responses and the type of people we become are inseparable in a world where the descriptions that we attribute to ourselves and our actions are never neutral. In other words, in the absence of a grand universal scheme, *all* our decisions and actions take on ethical significance. Although von Foerster draws attention to the ethical consequences of our actions in an interdependent world, it is also clear from the above citation that our actions cannot have political consequences. On von Foerster's (1990) view, the fact that we do not occupy an external vantage point means that it is not possible for us to deliver judgement on the actions of others – only on our own actions. This view of ethics is explicitly apolitical, as politics demands that one takes a stand. Although compelling in its modesty, such an argument also bears solipsistic consequences (see footnote 90). To see why this is the case, it is necessary to trace the development of von Foerster's argument.

Von Foerster (1990) follows Ludwig Wittgenstein (*Tractatus* 6.421), in defining ethics as transcendental, which, in the words of Rasch (2000: 77), means that '[e]thics… cannot deal with the world, and cannot leave describable evidence of itself in the world; it serves as the unspeakable limit or condition of the world.' Any attempt to think ethics, implies the attempt to transcend the contingent world of sense-making, in order to contemplate the absolute (80). This is of course impossible – hence, Wittgenstein's (*Tractatus* 6.421), famous words: '*Es ist klar, dass sich Ethik nicht aussprechen lasst'* (It is clear that ethics cannot be articulated). As soon as we attempt to articulate ethics, 'the inside turned outside is recaptured as an inside' (Rasch, 2000: 80). According

to Rasch, this results in a large and oppressive immanence as we are left with systemic solipsism: 'The outside is acknowledged as the absolute condition for the existence of the inside, but it remains supremely unknowable. It is the silence that delimits the world' (80).

Note that the above view corresponds with Luhmann's view of social systems as autopoietic systems. Since there is no external vantage point from which to conceptualise of ethics, any talk of ethics merely amounts to a system's description of its own operations (see chap. 3, sec. 5.3). In other words, any projected identity is the result of a 'normative distinction' that can only have 'a historical and not a transcendental or a linguistic justification' (Luhmann, 2000: 39).

In endorsing the notion of operationally-closed systems, von Foerster essentially agrees with both Wittgenstein's and Luhmann's positions: it is impossible to conceptualise of a transcendental ethics; the best we can do is to account for the way in which we describe our systems. According to Wittgenstein, this implies mastering the use of language so that ethics remains implicit to our practices (*Tractatus*, 6.422) – the implications of which are further discussed in section 3.1. Furthermore, as stated above, this view of ethics also implies that we are unable to judge the ethics of anyone else's practices. In the absence of an *a priori* viewpoint, we can only guard over ourselves and our own practices.

2.2. Ethical models and limit concepts: accounting for the quasi-transcendental

In order for our understanding of ethics to carry political force, one must show that ethics is not recursive (in the strong sense of maintaining itself within its own operationally-closed system). Following the insights derived from critical complexity, we can say that complex systems are open systems, and that the environment is able to penetrate the system. If one can show that ethics can penetrate the system, then ethics can be imbued with political force (by still acting as a regulative ideal). Morin (2008: 92) supports this notion that – although there no omniscient vantage point – one, nevertheless, needs to construct a meta-point of view, in order to avoid total relativism or ethnocentrism. Therefore, a second important distinction can be drawn between ethicists who concede to the possibility of 'knowing' ethics and ethicists who view ethics as belonging to an external, transcendental realm.

As stated in chapter three (sec. 5.3.), Derrida's philosophy presents an attempt to find a breach or gap in the system, which serves to give ethics a voice. In this regard, it is specifically useful to reference Derrida's work on 'limit concepts', such as justice and the gift, since – as argued in the

previous chapter (sec. 6.2.) – these concepts represent an attempt to think transcendental ethics within the world. This demands a measure of complex thinking, because to recall Morin's (11) words, in an open system '[t]he environment is at the same time intimate and foreign: it is part of the system while remaining exterior to it' (see chap. 3, sec. 2.3.). Teubner (2001:42; my italics) brilliantly captures the methodological complexity of thinking about open systems in his analysis of Derrida's understanding of justice and the gift:

> This is Derrida's central thesis: justice as transcendence in an irreconcilable contrast to the immanence of positive law which, however, is haunting law constantly. And it is here that the parallels to the relationship of gift to circulation of the economy become visible. The gift is not only… an ethical or political counter-principle to the cold economic logic of capitalism. The gift transcends every social relation and provokes it… as an unconditional demand for the Other (Derrida, 1992[a]: Ch. 2). *The gift is not pure transcendence without any connection to the circulation to the economy, but in a self-contradictory relation of unrevisable separation and permanent provocation.* Thus Derrida's repeated calls for political engagement, which are provoked by the unsatiated demands of a transcendent justice and gift (Derrida, 1990: 933).[81]

Although justice can never be encapsulated in law, and although the gift can never be given within the framework of the economy, these limit concepts, nonetheless, shape and drive the ethics of our institutions. As such, Teubner (2001: 43) argues, with reference to the practice of law, that it makes an important difference whether or not 'one is exposed to a 'deconstructive justice', to extreme demands of justice that can never be realized… to a sense of fundamental failure of law, even a tragic experience that whatever you decide in law will end in injustice and guilt.'

Note, that in terms of this argument, one remains an actor participating in the drama of mutual interaction (as opposed to an independent observer), but one is still forced to deliver judgement, to say "Thou shalt…" or "Thou shalt not…" However, the difference between a universal, objective conception of ethics and a complex ethics is that, in the latter case, one cannot pass judgement – one cannot moralise – without being acutely aware of the fact that one has failed to encapsulate justice, and of recognising that one's meta-points of view are 'limited and fragile' (Morin, 2008: 92).

81 Teubner uses the following alternative reference for 'Force of Law' (which, elsewhere, is referenced as Derrida, 1992b): Derrida, J. (1990) 'Force of law: the mystical foundation of authority' in *Cardozo Law Review*, 11: 919 – 1046.

The continual deferral of the ethical is also, paradoxically, the very impetus of both politics and ethics (see Krell, 1988). Just as the environment feeds the system, so, too, the limit concepts feed our desire for the good, and prevent us from turning ethics into a mere moral code. Note, that this deferral of the ethical is also what feeds deconstruction: in chapter four (sec. 3.1.), Derrida (1999: 82) was cited as saying that ethical '[t]estimony, which implies faith or promise, governs the entire social space…. It is only by reference to the possibility of testimony that deconstruction can begin to ask questions concerning knowledge and meaning.' Deconstruction is, therefore, a means by which to articulate the ethical interruption of ontological closure which saves us from ethical solipsism, allows for the manifestation of justice in the singularity of the event, and prevents us from turning justice into a moral code.

Therefore, in summary, it is not only important to take cognisance of the way in which we are implicated in our ethical models (i.e. that we, through means of our practices and beliefs, in part *constitute* our ethical models), but that these models are also regulated by the ideals of justice. This implies that although ethical models represent radically immanent expressions of our sense of ethics; they, nevertheless, call for transcendental justification, which, in practical terms, means that they are always subject to revision. Being responsible, therefore, means subjecting oneself and one's models to an always renewable openness (to recall Wood's (1999) words)

3. The embeddedness of ethical practices

3.1. Relating the other to the self and the self to the other

Despite denying that we can know ethics in any transcendental sense (and thereby deliver judgement in terms of punishment and reward), Wittgenstein does maintain that a type of immanent expression of ethics can manifest itself it our use of language. In this regard, consider the following citation: ethics 'must reside in the action itself… For any discourse I may have – say, in science, philosophy, epistemology, therapy, etc. – [sic] to master the use of my language so that ethics is implicit' (*Tractatus* (6.422) cited in von Foerster, 1990). Von Foerster (1990) explores this view further, and argues that the way in which we can 'hide ethics from all eyes and still let her determine language and action' is through dialogics. Although this study attempts to move beyond the relativist and solipsitic implications that emerge from a strong view of recursivity, it is, nevertheless, also important to take note of the type of ethical considerations that emerge from the embeddedness of our ethical practices. In this regard, we follow von Foerster in his analysis of dialogics.

Von Foerster argues that language as function[82] is dialogical in nature, and helps us to understand ourselves through interacting with others in the world[83]. Von Foerster (1990) uses the metaphor of dance to describe dialogics. Just as it takes two to tango, it also takes two to language: '[language] noises are invitations to the other to make some dance steps together'. In '*Understanding Systems: Conversations on epistemology and ethics'* von Foerster (von Foerster & Poerksen, 2002: 42) provides a description of the Language Tango, but a more forceful description is to be found in the last few lines of Martin Buber's (2001) book, *Das Problem des Menschen*, which von Foerster (1990) cites as follows:

> Contemplate the human with the human, and you will see the dynamic duality, the human essence, together: here is the giving and the receiving, here the aggressive and defensive power, here the quality of searching and of responding, always both in one, mutually complementing in alternating action, demonstrating what it is: human. Now you can turn to the single one and recognize him as human for his potential of relating. We may come closer to answering the question "What is human?" when we come to understand him as the being in whose dialogic, in his mutually present two-getherness, the encounter of the one with the other is realized and recognized at all times.

The reason for preferring Buber's definition over von Foerster's, is because in Buber's definition, there is a certain acknowledgement of the fact that the Language Tango does not merely represent the act of 'merg[ing] into one and the same person, to a being that see the world with four eyes' (von Foerster & Poerksen, 2002: 42), but is also an activity characterised by aggression and defence, by search and response. However, even Buber's formulation is not radical enough, the reasons for this being that, 1) unlike a structured dance in which partners mirror each other, our

[82] Von Foerster (1990) identifies two different tracks of language: the first is appearance, and the second is function. With regard to appearance, von Foerster (1990) writes that, on this track, language is a monologue. The appearance of language has to do with the formal elements of language: the noises that we make when we utter words, the words themselves, and the rules of grammar and syntax that we employ to form sentences. This first track of language corresponds with Morin's (2008: 73-78) understanding of language, as the means by which we develop a sense of identity through self-objectification and self-reference. In this regard, von Foerster (1990) writes that '[i]n its appearance, the language I speak is my language. It makes me aware of myself: this is the root of consciousness.' Consciousness is, therefore, the process in which 'I can possess myself' and 'refer to myself' (Morin, 2008: 73). Language as appearance, thus, allows me to distinguish myself from others.

[83] The question arises as to whether one can endorse a strong view of recursivity, whilst arguing for the interdependencies between people. The way in which these views can be reconciled is through recourse to the notion of structural coupling, which refers to 'the process through which structurally-determined transformations in each of two or more systemic unities induces (for each) a trajectory of reciprocally-triggered change' (Encyclopedia Autopoietica). Structural coupling is an important concept in autopoietic theory, and is crucial to understanding the phenomenological aspects of the theory, such as language (See: 'Structural coupling' in the Encyclopedia Autopoietica. Available online at: http://www.cybsoc.org/EA.html#S Published March 31, 1998.)

human relations are characterised by asymmetry, non-linearity, power, and competition (Cilliers, 1998: 120); 2) the metaphor of dance cannot account for the face of the third, or the one who destroys the dual relation that I experience in my confrontation with the Other (Derrida, 1999: 68-69); and, 3) the metaphor of dance assumes that we know who or what our dance partner is, and does not account for the way in which language as dialogical escapes the intentions of the author, and the context in which the speech-act or 'dance' is performed.

What is positive about the metaphor of dance, however, is that it evokes the role of communicative action relayed via bodies (and conducted in the medium of proto-symbols) (Stacey, 2001: 166). It also draws attention to the rules of the language dance. Indeed, in speaking of the pragmatics of narrative knowledge, Lyotard (1984: 18) writes that narratives can only be successfully conveyed if they adhere to certain locally legitimised rules and standards. In other words, certain utterances are 'judged to be "good" because they conform to the relevant criteria (of justice, beauty, truth, and efficiency respectively) accepted in the social circles of the "knowers" interlocutors'. Such utterances are often related to knowledge pertaining to '"know-how," "knowing how to live," "how to listen" [*savoir-faire, savoir-vivre, savoir-écouter*], etc.' These narrative rules evolve out of the social structure, and are subject to evaluation and transformation[84]. Therefore:

> It becomes the responsibility of every player in any discursive practice to know the rules of the game involved. These rules are local, i.e. 'limited in time and space' ([Lyotard, 1984:] 66). In following such rules one has to assume responsibility both for the rules themselves and for the effects of that specific practice. This responsibility cannot be shifted to any universally guiding principles or institutions (Cilliers, 1998: 137).

Apart from the above advantages, the main strength of the dance metaphor is that it draws attention to the dialectic of dance – the fact that one must give, but also receive. Von Foerster (1990) states that it is not a fact – as Descartes (1960: 110) would have it – that I think, therefore I am (*'Cogito ergo Sum'*) but that I think, therefore we are (*'Cogito ergo sumus'*). If we are relationally-constituted, it would seem that one of the most important ethical obligations is to continually evaluate the way in which we relate with others. Indeed, von Foerster (1990) writes that '[i]n its function, my language reaches out for the other: this is the root of conscience.' Derrida (1995b: 281-282) supports this view, writing that '…as concerns the "Good" [*Bien*] of every morality, the question will come back to determining the best, most respectful, most grateful, and also most

[84] As an example, consider narratives about race in South Africa during Apartheid vs. Post-Apartheid.

giving way of relating to the other and of relating the other to the self.' Derrida (1995b), however, does not depict this process of relating with the other as a dance, but as a way of eating.

The metaphor of eating has the added advantage that it accounts not only for the way that we communicate, but also for all the other ways in which we asymmetrically appropriate each other, both in terms of physical nourishment (eating, suckling) and in terms of our being-together-with-the-other in the world (in the sense of seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, touching, and talking). For Derrida, our relations with one another should be governed by the ethical mandate: '*Il faut bien manger*", which must be understood both as 'one must eat well' (475) (in the sense of '*learning* and *giving* to eat, learning-to-give-the-other-to-eat' (282)); as well as 'everybody has to eat'. And, the adverb 'bien' must be nominalised into 'Le Bien', to imply 'the eating of the Good' (475). Furthermore, because one never eats entirely on one's own, this ethical mandate is the rule offering infinite hospitality (282) (see Vrba (Woermann), 2006: 81-82). Derrida's ethical mandate, in drawing attention to the many ways in which we relate with one another, shifts our understanding of responsibility as a causal process (in which we are accountable for our actions) to an understanding of responsibility that is grounded in a large explicit and tacit network of relations (in which we are accountable towards one another) (see Painter-Morland, 2008).

3.2. The murkiness of identity

An implication that emerges from the above analysis is that if we, in part, form our sense of identity through our interaction with one another, then the 'I' is impure. In Morin's (2008: 80) words:

> when "I" speak, it is also a "we" that speaks, the we of that warm collectivity of which we are a part. But there is not only the "we": "They" also speak when "I" speak, a "they" which is the voice of a more cold and anonymous collectivity. In every human "I" there is a "we" and a "they." The I, therefore, is not something pure, nor is it alone.

This relational, emergent, and impure understanding of identity also introduces a principle of uncertainty: I can never be sure to what extent it is I who is speaking (80). Therefore, as Derrida (1995b: 284-285) maintains, in order to understand language we need to account for the irreducibility that marks it from the inside. He notes that, in this context, he is thinking specifically 'of the mark in general, of the trace, of iterability, of différance' (285) – all of which imply that an element's ''own constitution as an autonomous or fully complete entity' is always deferred (Lucy, 2004: 27; see chap. 5, sec. 2.3.2.). Once one accounts for the impurity of identity, one quickly

realises that there is no single linear, oppositional limit between an 'I' and the 'other', nor is there a single limit between the human and the infrahuman (285). Derrida (285) remarks that this insight bears consequences for 'the ethics and politics of living.' In this regard, consider the following concrete examples:

> There is no need to emphasize that this question of the subject and of the living "who" is at the heart of the most pressing concerns of modern societies, whether they are deciding birth or death, including what is presupposed in the treatment of sperm or the ovum, surrogate mothers, genetic engineering, so called bioethics or biopolitics (what should be the role of the State in determining or protecting a living subject?), the accredited criteriology for determining, indeed for "euthanastically" provoking death… organ removal and transplant… (283).

Derrida (285) raises these examples to show that '[w]e know less than ever where to cut – either at birth or death. And this also means that we never know, and never have known, how to *cut up* a subject. Today less than ever.' That we are less certain of how to deal with the question of the subject today is not only due to the fact that our identities are fluid, but is also an outcome of advances in all the sciences. This is because as they develop they create political problems (Morin, 2008: 94). This, according to Morin (94), means that politics has become very complex, since it is now concerned with all dimensions of humanity. However, Morin (94-95) argues that the response to this complexity is dominated by economic and technical thinking, rather than forms of thinking capable of understanding politics in its multi-dimensionality.

In summary: in order to nurture forms of thinking that allow us to account for the multi-dimensionality of complex phenomena, we must concede to the fact that identity and language are characterised by *différance* and the trace. This means that there are no natural demarcations. Political decisions cannot be viewed as descriptive programmes, but are grounded in ethical decisions; and, these decisions have very real affects on us and on others.

The implication of this analysis is that, since identity is not a pre-given, we need to continually examine and deconstruct our identities, including – as mentioned in chapter three (sec. 6.2.) – the systems within which we are embedded and which give rise to these identities, the power relations that exist between us and others, and the permeability of the boundaries that define our individual and group identities (Paulsen, 2003:17)). Only if we foster awareness of the status of our identities, will we be able to assume responsibility for the many ways in which we are dependent on, and formed by, others and by our operating environments. In other words, deconstruction helps protect

against an insular sense of identity by challenging the boundaries that define our conceptual systems of meaning, and by revealing the imbrications of the self and the world. In this sense, deconstruction points the way towards a more open and more responsible future, one in which our thinking of responsibility 'does not stop at *this* determination of the neighbour, at the dominant schema of this determination' (Derrida, 1995b: 284).

4. Ethics as a critical, provisional position

4.1. A complex ethics and the necessity of politics

In chapter three (secs 1 & 6.3.), the idea of a critical position was introduced. Following Cilliers (2010a: 14), it was specifically argued that such a position rests on a self-critical rationality, which can be defined as 'a rationality that makes no claim for objectivity, or for any special status for the grounds from which the claim is made'. A self-critical rationality is, therefore, the outcome of acknowledging the limited status of our ethical models, and of our partial understanding of the predicates of subjecthood (both in general terms, and in terms of the implications held for specific identities). Otherwise stated, a self-critical rationality is the outcome of acknowledging the irreducible nature of complexity (2).

What makes the critical position difficult to deal with is that it does not serve as an excuse for inaction. We have no objective knowledge, and we cannot determine in advance how our actions affect ourselves and others, yet we have to act. In other words, we have to engage in politics. The critical position, therefore, also holds important implications for not only how we view ethics, but also politics. Politics – like ethics – cannot follow a predetermined programme, but must be shaped by strategies. Morin (2008: 96) explains as follows: politics should not rule, but must 'navigate by sight, which is what is evoked, etymologically, in the word "cybernetic"'. He is, however, quick to qualify that this 'doesn't only mean that politics must navigate day by day; it must [also] have an idea that lights the way like a beacon' (976).

Although mechanistic projections and abstract programmes will always be thwarted by actual events, one can, nevertheless, project values and motivating ideas, which can guide the way into the future. To this, Derrida (2002a: 25) adds that the way into the future is through negotiation, which, as previously stated (chap. 5, sec. 7.2.), takes place between affirmation (ethics) and position (politics), because the position threatens the affirmation. However, he also adds that '[a]ffirmation requires a position. It requires that one move to action and do something, even if it is imperfect'

(25). Both Derrida (29) and Morin (2007: 25) identify vigilance ('the cautionary principle') and urgency ('the risk principle') as the *aporia* which marks the double bind of ethics and politics. Morin (25) further offers Pericles' speech to the Athenians during the Peloponnesian war as a practical illustration of this principle: 'we Athenians, we are capable of combining prudence *and* audacity, whereas the others are *either* timorous *or* bold' (my italics).

It is argued that the double-logic of ethics and politics marks the heart of the critical position. We need to act, even though we *know* that we cannot get it right (Preiser & Cilliers, 2010: 270), which again affirms the point that a complex ethics is necessarily a provisional ethics, in need of constant revision. It is this central insight that leads Preiser and Cilliers (283) to characterise the critical position as a position demanding transgression, irony, and imagination. They argue that identifying these three characteristics serves as a starting point in developing the critical position, but qualify that these characteristics need further elaboration. In the sections to follows, some additional remarks are made as to what these characteristics might entail.

4.2. The critical position demands transgression

4.2.1. Ethics as a desire to do justice to inexistance

The fact that the critical position demands transgression is one of the central, if not the central insight of this analysis. Indeed, both the analysis of critical complexity and deconstruction support this point. We live in excess of meaning, and there is no way in which to do justice to this complexity, except to constantly revise and transgress our limited models and perspectives. At this juncture, it is useful to again briefly summarise the crux of this insight at the hand of Alain Badiou's (2009) description of the deconstructive enterprise. In a beautiful tribute to Derrida, Badiou (132) writes that:

> what is at stake in Derrida's work, in his never-ending work, in his writing, ramified as it is into so many varied works, into infinitely varied approaches, is the *inscription of the non-existent.* And the recognition, in the work of inscribing the non-existent, that its inscription is, strictly speaking, impossible. What is at stake in Derrida's writing – and here 'writing' designates a thought-act – is *the inscription of the impossibility of the non-existence as the form of its inscription.*

Badiou (134) describes Derrida as the opposite of a hunter: a hunter hopes that the animal will arrest its movements, so that it can be shot. For Derrida, however, the animal cannot cease fleeing. Locating the animal does not mean grasping it. Badiou (133) calls this "Derrida's problem':

> what is grasping a fleeing [*fluite*]? Not grasping that which flees, not at all. But grasping fleeing *qua* vanishing point. The difficulty, which means that you always have to start again, is that, if you grasp fleeing, you suppress it at the same time. The vanishing point cannot be grasped *qua* vanishing point. It can only be located.

Deconstruction operates in service of the endless flight. In trying to account for the inexistent (which, as Badiou (140) emphatically states, is not the same as nothingness), we inevitably pull the outside (i.e. that which is not accounted for (does not exist) in our conceptual paradigms) into our systems of meaning. In other words, seizing the non-existent would mean its death, because the alterity of the other is then assimilated into our systems of meaning. This is why we always have to start again in trying to do justice to the inexistent (hence, the fact that deconstruction implies an endless task). The nature of the inexistent does not conform to binary logic. Rather, the desire for inexistence is supported by the 'monstration of the slippage' (i.e. the slippage that occurs between saying that 'the non-existent *is*' (which fails to convey that it does not exist) and 'the non-existent does not exists' (which fails to convey that it *is*) (141)). As such, Badiou's (143) tribute to Derrida lies in his decision to write inexistence with an 'a' (inexist*a*nce) in a similar fashion to *différance*, in order to also attempt to 'couch non-existence', and, thereby, to do justice to those who lie beyond our systems of meaning.

On the one hand, *inexistance* implies ethics (i.e. the grasping of fleeing as vanishing point, which also entails an endless vigilance). On the other hand, one has a duty to transgress existing boundaries or limits and give voice to the non-existent (in this regard, the war cry of a Revolution rings 'We are nothing, let us be all!' (141)). In other words, one has a duty to take a position and engage in politics. The transgressive nature of the critical position is, therefore, fed by the slippages of ethics, but leads to the binaries of politics. In this regard, a responsible, transgressive politics is characterised by the following three acknowledgements: the acknowledgement of an irreducible complexity to which we cannot do justice (as manifested in the *inexistant*); the acknowledgement of freedom and constraints (as necessary conditions for action and transformation); and the acknowledgement of choice. In the following section, the ethical implications associated with acknowledging our freedom, constraints, and choices are investigated.

4.2.2. Freedom, constraints, and choice

Von Foerster (1990) argues that '[t]here are indeed among propositions, proposals, problems, questions, those that are decidable, and those that are in principle undecidable' and further argues that '[o]nly those questions that are in principle undecidable, we can decide' (italicised in the original). The reason for this is because undecidable questions are questions related to complex phenomena, and, therefore, have no clear-cut answers, but rather require judgement, strategy, and choice. Von Foerster's (1990) argument is remarkably similar to Derrida's (1988a: 116) reasoning that '[a] decision can only come into being in a space that exceeds the calculable program… Even if a decision seems to take only a second and not to be preceded by any deliberation, it is structured by this *experience and experiment of the undecidable*'.

Whereas Derrida (1999: 66) calls this 'the terrible process of undecidability' (see chap. 5, sec. 6.3.), von Foerster (1990) sees freedom in the moment of the decision: 'We are free! The complement to necessity is not chance, it is choice! We can choose who we wish to become when we have decided on in principle undecidable questions.'[85] This acknowledgement of freedom is, indeed, very important to any complex understanding of both ethics and politics. As with von Foerster's account, Morin stresses the importance of freedom as a condition for choice and self-actualisation. However, Morin (2008) also introduces the element of constraint, which is imposed upon our freedom. In this regard, Morin (113) writes: 'the complex notion of self-organization permits us to conceive of beings that are relatively autonomous as beings while remaining subject to the necessities and hazards of *existence.*' Morin (114) further adds that these constraints or dependencies are necessary:

> The autonomy of individuals is acquired through innumerable dependencies: one must be nourished and loved by the parents, must learn to speak and to write, must go to school, university, and encode a highly diversified culture to acquire ever greater possibilities of autonomy. *Autonomy, therefore, should always be conceived not in opposition to, but in complementarity with, the idea of dependence* (my italics).

In other word, in order for our choices to have meaning, we must be part of a system of relations and, therefore, be constrained. Derrida takes this argument even further. For him, the constraints

[85] Bauman (in Cilliers, 1998: 138) shares von Foerster's (1990) understanding of responsibility as the freedom to choose. Whereas modernism's attempts to structure our freedom resulted in imprisonment, a postmodernist attitude sets us free – not to do as we please, but to act ethically. For Bauman (1992: xxii), this attitude involves a paradox, which he describes as follows:

> [moral freedom] restores to agents the fullness of moral choice and responsibility while simultaneously depriving them of the comfort of the universal guidance that that modern self-confidence once promised… Moral responsibility comes with the loneliness of moral choice.

themselves generate undecidable questions, in that conflicting demands compete with one another in the moment of choice. In this context, consider again the following passage:

> I would say that the text is complicated, there are many meanings struggling with one another, there are tensions, there are overdeterminations, there are equivocations; but this does not mean that there is indeterminacy. On the contrary, there is too much determinacy. That is the problem (Derrida, 1999: 79).

What should be clear from the above is that undecidable and complex questions arise due to both relational dependencies and autonomy. The vision of life as either the product of pure determinism or free will is impossible (Morin, 2008: 115). Rather, the complexity of life is generated by both dependence and freedom; and, in order to understand the nature of choice, these aspects must be thought simultaneously. Our freedom, however, comes at a price: if we are free to choose, we are responsible for the consequences of our decisions and actions. Therefore, as recognised by von Foerster (1990), freedom is a terrible burden to some.

Similar to Bauman's (1989; 1993) arguments against bureaucracy (see chap. 1, sec. 4.1.1), which results in the effacement of the Other's face, von Foerster (1990) argues that the sheer burden of responsibility imposed by undecidable questions has led people to construct entire hierarchies and institutions where it is impossible to localise responsibility: 'Everyone in such a system can say: "I was told to do X." This denial of responsibility has, in part, to do with the fear of admitting that we are responsible for the future effects of our decisions and actions, especially because we cannot predict what these effects will be. To use Derrida's word: our decisions and actions *disseminate*, because meaning, although sown in the moment of decision and action, is not determined by the particular moment or context, but rather scatters in several directions at once[86]. This same point can also be made from the perspective of critical complexity, with reference to what Morin (2008: 55; 2007: 26) calls 'the principle of ecology of action': as soon as an action is taken, it begins to escape from the intentions and will of its creator, and is taken up in a network of interactions and multiple feedbacks, which deprives it of finality[87]. Sometimes an action can even have the opposite effect of what was initially intended. Morin (2007: 26) offers the following example:

> When one sees that a revolution was made in [Russia in] 1917 to suppress the exploitation of man by his fellow man, to create a new society, founded on the principles of community

[86] See Lucy (2004: 27 – 31) for a fuller description of Derrida's use of the term 'dissemination'.
[87] This implies not only that we are responsible for our actions, but infinitely so, as they continue to reverberate through our systems.

> and liberty, and that this revolution, not only caused immense losses of blood, destruction, and repression by a police system, but, after seventy years, it led to its contrary, i.e. to a capitalism even more fierce than that of the tsarist times, and with a return to religion! Everything that this revolution wanted to destroy resurrected. How not to think about the ecology of action!

Morin (2008: 55) argues that if our actions 'fly back at our heads like a boomerang', we are obliged to follow the actions, in order to attempt to correct them. This will only be successfully achieved if we are aware from the outset that action implies 'risk, hazard, initiative, decision… derailments and transformation.' In other words, every 'action is also a wager' and '[w]e must be aware of our philosophical and political wagers' (54). It is only when we refuse to engage in the complexity with which we are confronted when we undertake decisions and actions, and when we close down awareness of what lies outside of our immediate experiences, that we are in danger of reflecting the attitude of Pontius Pilate (Sontag, 2007: 227).

To view the critical task as transgressive is not to see the goals of ethics and politics as 'violat[ing] the basic laws or human civilization', as is implied by some of the definitions of 'transgression'[88]. Acting responsibly does not mean acting like the Lone Ranger, but rather necessitates that we concede to the inextricable ways in which our lives are bound up in our systems of meaning, whilst nevertheless remaining vigilant to the fact that we still have a responsibility to break open and transgress these systems of meaning to account for the non-existent, and to take responsibility for our choices and actions – even when they have undesirable consequences. To many, the type of responsibility implied by a complex ethics may seem overwhelming, and for this reason, we need to live with a degree of humour and irony, in order to both maintain our humanity (Preiser & Cilliers, 2010: 283), and to develop fruitful strategies for living.

4.3. The critical position demands irony

There are various definitions of irony[89], of which the following three are particularly noteworthy: 'the use of words expressing something other than their literal intention'; 'characterized by an often poignant difference or incongruity between what is expected and what actually is'; and, 'contrary to plan or expectation'. What these three definitions have in common is that they introduce an element of contingency and play into literal, objective language. As such, it is argued that irony requires

[88] http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=transgress
[89] http://www.google.co.za/search?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&q=define%3a+irony

creativity and improvisation, and that there is 'an important and potentially fruitful connection' between these skills and 'the lived experience of complexity' (Montuori, 2003: 238). Montuori (238) further argues 'that improvisation and creativity are capacities we would do well to develop in an increasingly unpredictable, complex, and at times chaotic experience.' It is specifically in relation to developing fruitful and responsible strategies for living that the innovative, creative, and ironic dimension of the critical task will be investigated in this section.

Von Foerster (1990) argues that there are two types of people in the world, namely 'discoverers' and 'inventors', and that he is 'surprised again and again by the depth of the abyss that separates the two fundamentally different worlds' created by choosing either the one path, or the other. He (1990) writes that '[t]he discoverers will most likely become astronomers, physicists and engineers; the inventors family therapists, poets and biologists.'

The distinction between the discoverer and the inventor is reminiscent of Claude Levi-Strauss's distinction between the engineer and the *bricoleur* (or handy man). In 'Structure, sign, and play', Derrida (1978a: 285) writes that whereas the engineer 'should be the one to construct the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon'; the *bricoleur* 'is someone who uses "the means at hand"'. However, since no absolute origin exists, the engineer remains a theological idea; or, more radically, 'the odds are that the engineer is a myth produced by the *bricoleur.*' Derrida's point is that the world is a complex place, and pretending that it is otherwise is also merely a *bricolage* or strategy for dealing with the world. As such, Derrida (285) deconstructs the opposition between engineer and *bricoleur*, by writing that:

> as soon as we admit that every finite discourse is bound by a certain *bricolage* and that the engineer and the scientist are also species of *bricoleurs,* then the very idea of *bricolage* is menaced and the difference in which it took on its meaning breaks down.

Von Foerster (1990) argues that the type of strategies that we employ for dealing with the world is the outcome of undecidable questions. The point is not 'who is right, or who is wrong', but whether people acknowledge the choices that they have made in deciding on a life strategy. In order to substantiate this point, he quotes José Ortega y Gasset (in von Foerster, 1990):

> Man does not have a nature, but a history. Man is no thing, but a drama. His life is something that has to be chosen, made up as he goes along, and a human consists in that choice and invention. Each human being is the novelist of himself, and though he may

> choose between being an original writer and a plagiarist, he cannot escape choosing… He is condemned to be free.

There can be no *a priori* basis from which to argue for the merits of one life strategy over another. However, it is important to assume responsibility for, and bear the consequences of, our choices and decisions. This is only possible if we are *aware* of the nature and status of our strategies, which Morin (2008: 96) refers to as 'the art of working with uncertainty'. This awareness will undoubtedly expose the engineer to himself as a *bricoleur*, and this realisation will impact on further decisions and actions. Furthermore, as mentioned by Derrida, this realisation also serves to destabilise the meaning of *bricolage*, since one becomes acutely aware of the fact that 'the discoverers discover inventors, and the inventors invent discoverers' (von Foerster, 1990).

We are all improvisers who not only tell a story, but *become* a story. We create interwoven narratives, which together, constitute a tapestry of stories (Montuori, 2003: 246; see also: Kearney, 1988). The ethical moment lies in whether we concede to this or not, i.e. whether we accept – with irony and humour – our limited knowledge and fragile personal experiences, and focus these in the very moment that we are living in (Montuori, 2003: 244). To be able to improvise and to live with irony:

> requires a different discipline, a different way of organizing our thoughts and actions. It requires, and at best elicits, a social virtuosity which reflects our state of mind, our perceptions of who we are, and a willingness to take risks, to let go of the safety of the ready-made, the already written, and to think, create, and 'write' on the spot (244).

Assuming an ironic disposition not only lightens the burden of self-awareness, but also leads to an acknowledgement of the strategies that we employ in constituting our life narratives. This is because those who live with irony find it easier to confess to the fact that their lives are not following a determinate course, but represent the outcome of undecidable decisions and actions. Without this acknowledgement (which implies a self-critical rationality), we potentially open the door to human evil. This is because, as Sontag (2007: 227) suggests, it is exactly 'this refusal of an extended awareness' (which she defines as taking in 'more than is happening *right now, right here*') that lies at the heart of 'our ever-confused awareness of evil' and 'of the immense capacity of human beings to commit evil'. In a sense then, it is irony that allows us to face up to the seriousness of our responsibilities, which is an insight which accords beautifully with the definition of irony as

'characterized by an often poignant difference or incongruity between what is expected and what actually is'.

4.4. The critical position demands imagination

In cultivating an ironic disposition, the ability to improvise allows us to *react* appropriately to events and to forge successful life strategies. However, improvisation also allows us to *generate* events in a creative and innovative fashion (see Montuori, 2003: 240). In this latter sense, the creative task lies not in cultivating an ironic disposition, but in imagining a better, and more sustainable future (see Preiser & Cilliers, 2010: 283). In this regard, assuming a critical position can spur on transformation since, as Allen (2000: 103) notes, creativity and, one could add, imagination 'is the motor of change, and the hidden dynamic that underlies the rise and fall of civilizations, peoples, and regions, and evolution both encourages and feeds on invention'. Central to the imaginative dimension of the critical task, is the ability to generate requisite variety and options, and to break out of one's 'closed or limited hermeneutic circles' (to again quote Verstraeten (2000: ix)). This, in itself, requires respect for difference, and reinforces the need to deconstruct that which is still too homogenous, insufficiently refined or differentiated, or else egalitarian (Derrida, 2002a: 20).

Indeed, when pressed for an ethical mandate, von Foerster (in von Foerster & Poerksen, 2002: 36; italicised in the original) offers the following imperative: 'Act always as to increase the number of choices'[90]. Von Foerster further argues in support of what he calls 'a mind that confounds', stating that whereas '[t]he Devil tries to homogenize the different perspectives until everyone thinks, believes, and acts the same way'[91], the 'Confounder enlarges the field of vision, opening up new possibilities and revealing the abundance' (36). Von Foerster use the term 'confounder' in an

[90] Both Derrida's and von Foerster's perspectives are compatible with a critical complexity perspective, which reinforces the importance of difference and diversity, in that a system is viewed not only as 'a composition of unity out of diversity, but also a composition of internal diversity out of unity' (Morin, 1992: 373). Despite these similarities in perspective, there is also a crucial difference which is based on the fact that von Foerster's position is politically impotent. In this regard, consider the following example (von Foerster & Poerksen, 2002: 37): an interviewer (Poerksen) argues that one 'can't support the opportunity of a propagandist to distribute vicious and inflammatory literature' on the basis that people's choices should be expanded. To this von Foerster replies: 'Why not? Should I ban his or her literature, and remove the books from the libraries because they contradict what I believe in?' Ultimately, von Foerster is defending a relativist position, which makes it impossible for him to deliver judgement on whether certain ways of life are, ethically-speaking, more desirable than others. Through recourse to the insights gleaned from the critical complexity perspective and Derrida's work, one is able to circumvent this problem (as illustrated in section 2.2.).

[91] Both Derrida and Morin also oppose homogenising strategies. As previously stated, Derrida (1988a: 119) calls those who wish to simplify at all costs 'dangerous dogmatists and tedious obscurantists'. Morin (2008) explicitly focuses on the ravages caused by simplifying visions – in both the intellectual world and in life. In this regard, he writes that: '[m]uch of the suffering of millions of beings results from the effects of fragmented and one-dimensional thought' (57).

unorthodox manner, and it must be noted that he does not intend this term to designate a confused, or chaotic mind, but rather a mind capable of dealing with paradoxes and multiples realities; and, to do so in a way that does not overwhelm the individual ethical agent, but allows her to recognise her freedom, her choices, and her responsibilities; and, to encourage others to exercise the same degree of freedom, choice, and responsibility (von Foerster & Poerksen, 2002: 37). To see how this relates to the imaginative task, we turn to Hargrave's definition of moral imagination (which was also briefly referred to in chapter three, section 6.2., and which is described in detail in Woermann (2010)).

Hargrave (2009: 87) defines moral imagination as a social process, which 'emerges through dialectical processes that are influenced by actors' relative power and political skill'. Therefore, far from being a passive activity, moral imagination is a skill that needs to be fostered and exercised within 'pluralistic processes in which multiple actors with opposing moral viewpoints interact, and [where] no single actor is in control' (90). An element of conflict is also always present in imaginative activities because of the 'lived tensions between contradictory perspectives' (91). Although Hargrave views moral imagination in terms of a collective action model, his analysis of moral imagination also has implications for individuals. In this regard, Hargrave (91) argues that 'morally imaginative actors recognise and integrate contradictory moral viewpoints, and also integrate moral sensitivity… [of] contextual considerations.' Since these characteristics are also hallmarks of critical thought, one can argue that moral imagination is itself a critical activity (Woermann, 2010: 181). Another characteristic of moral imagination is that it involves an element of uncertainty or risk (186). Far from being a form of creative abandonment, moral imagination necessitates that we critically project and plan for the future (186). However, since this future cannot be known, and since uncertainty involves a real property of situations, we have to respond with judgement (Luntley, 2003: 325). The fact that moral imagination is a social process, involving an element of risk, also implies that we must be tolerant of each other's opinions, and also tolerant of failure.

When engaging in morally imaginative and critical activities, we must allow one another the space to exercise our freedom because, as von Foerster (in von Foerster & Poerksen, 2002: 37) states, 'if you rob someone of their freedom and shackle them, you also take away their chance to act responsibly.' Imagination, therefore, also requires trust in one another (which is a function of tolerance)[92]. Edmund Husserl (in Mensch, 2003: 143) explains that tolerance means that I affirm

[92] Von Foerster (1990) offers the following anecdote, in order to illustrate the importance of trust and tolerance:

'his ideals as his, as ideals which I must affirm in him, just as he must affirm my ideals – not, indeed, as his ideals of life but as the ideals of my being and life.' Mensch (142) explains that, in Latin, tolerance has the sense of supporting or sustaining, rather than enduring or suffering. He further states that 'it can be understood as the attitude that actively sustains the maximum number of compatible possibilities of being human' (142). As such, tolerance should be understood as the *ideal* of human fullness. The reason why Mensch views human fullness as an ideal is because human fullness demands more than can be achieved by a single individual (for example, we cannot simultaneously realise the possibility of being a professional weightlifter and sprinter). Therefore, for Mensch, tolerance 'appears when we acknowledge our finitude in attempting to embody this ideal' (142-143), as well as when we recognise the uniqueness and singularity of human beings (or the fact that even the most anonymous person is a 'veritable cosmos', who harbours 'a fabulous and unknown world' (Morin, 2008: 93)).

From this argument, we can deduce that tolerance is the acceptance of human complexity, even though this complexity can never be fully understood, but only imagined. Tolerance, therefore, flourishes in diverse human societies, in which freedom and other aspects of disorder are accepted, and in which innovation and creativity blossom in defiance of perspectives that try to frame societies as fixed, homogenous systems (Morin, 2008: 90). In this context, it is worthwhile to take note of Cilliers (2005: 264) argument in favour of the importance of the arts in fostering imagination. He states that creative activities (such as 'reading books, listening to music, appreciating art and film') should not be viewed as a form of entertainment to be indulged in after the serious work is done, but as a manner in which to 'stimulate the imagination and thereby transform the framework we apply when apprehending the world.'[93] He further argues that we need better imaginations to imagine better futures (264), and that without the creative arts, 'we will end up in the well-managed dystopia of the brave new world.'

> I have a friend who grew up in Marrakech. The house of his family stood on the street that divide [sic] the Jewish and Arabic quarter. As a boy he played with all the others, listened to what they thought and said, and learned of their fundamentally different views. When I asked him once, "Who was right" he said, "They are both right."
> "But this cannot be," I argued from an Aristotelian platform, "Only one of them can have the truth!"
> "The problem is not truth," he answered, "The problem is trust."

[93] Morin (1999: 53) also draws attention to the importance of the creative arts in arguing that the arts foster awareness of human complexity (which is necessary for understanding others), and draw attention to the full range of human subjectivity (which is necessary for developing compassion and sympathy). As an example, Morin (53) argues that fictional criminals – such as the gangster kings of Shakespeare, the royal gangsters of *films noirs,* Jean Valjean and Raskolnikov – are portrayed in all their fullness in literature and film, rather than the least or worst part of themselves (as is often the case with real life criminals). Morin also uses the example of the movie tramp, Charlie Chaplin, in order to illustrate how films use psychological techniques of projection and identification, which brings us to understand and sympathise with people that we would normally find foreign or disgusting. As such, books and films help us 'to learn the greatest lesson of life: compassion and true understanding for the humiliated in their suffering' (53).

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, a complex notion of ethics was elucidated at the hand of an analysis on the status of our ethical models, on the implications arising from the embeddedness of our practices, and on ethics as a critical and provisional position. In the last section, it was specifically argued that the critical position demands transgression of existing frameworks of meaning (whilst acknowledging our freedoms, constraints, and choices); an attitude of self-awareness and irony; and, imagination, openness, and tolerance (which are qualities needed both to foster transformation and to plan for a better future). It is abundantly clear from the preceding analysis that a complex, critical ethics presents a significant challenge to the standard normative tale. Such a notion of ethics debunks the idea that our responsibilities can be determined through recourse to prescriptive, moral programmes. Rather, we need to forge strategies that allow us to take responsible decisions, despite the fact that we cannot calculate our responsibilities in advance. Essential to this complex understanding of responsibility is an awareness of the *inexistant* (Badiou, 2009) – or of those for whom we do not account in our decisions and strategies, due to both the embeddedness of our positions (i.e. that we are part of dynamic, temporal, and spatial networks of multiple complex actions and reactions), and the limitations of our models.

A complex notion of ethics, in focusing on the *inexistant*, moves us 'towards the celebration of the paralogical', where paralogy is understood as a tool of epistemological subversion, and denotes the suppressed other in the game (Abraham, 2001: 171; see Lyotard, 1984). However, paralogy is also the very condition of the game, because as Kent (1993: 4) writes: 'without the suppressed other, no logical construct can exist because every logical construct, such as a discursive argument, demand that we ignore and suppress elements outside the construct' (see Derrida, 1988a: 117 in chap. 5, sec 7.1.). This reinforces the point that, despite our best efforts to 'couch non-existence' (Badiou, 2009: 143), we can never grasp the *inexistant*. If paralogy, however, is the condition of the game, then it stands to reason that a notion of ethics that attempts to account for the paralogical offers us a better tool for dealing with the world, than do modernist theories that deny the paralogical[94].

Although the merits of viewing ethics as a complex, transgressive, critical, and – hence – paralogical phenomenon were explained in detail in this chapter, the analysis also begs the question of what a complex ethics might mean in practice. In other words, what is the specific challenge that a complex ethics poses for the standard normative tale, and how does this challenge affect our

[94] In this regard, recall Linstead's (2004a: 5) description of postmodernism as paramodernism, or as that which looks for the fissures in the cosy state of modernist affairs (see chap. 2, sec. 2.2.1.).

thinking on prominent business ethics themes? These questions will be addressed in the following chapter, and the insights yielded will also be analysed in terms of the consequences that they hold for teaching business ethics.

Chapter 7:
Practical implications: The Case for Business Ethics

1. Introduction

In the introduction to this study, it was argued that complexity theory leads to 'new and different questions about what forms of intervention we should pursue' (Midgley, 2003: 93). At this stage, it is important to investigate the ways in which a complex ethics impacts upon our understanding of prominent business ethics themes. How we think about these themes affects the type of interventions and strategies that we pursue, including the way in which we teach business ethics.

Perhaps a first sceptical question that comes to mind is whether a complex ethics can, in fact, be institutionalised. In other words, can we translate the complexity insights into practice; and, if not, is business ethics a viable enterprise? In considering this question, let us first turn to Morin's (2008: 97) definition of complex thinking:

> complex thinking is not omniscient thinking. It is, on the contrary, a thinking which knows that it is always local, situated in a given time and place. Neither is it a complete thinking, for it knows in advance that there is always uncertainty.

Since ethics is a complex phenomenon, the above description applies to ethical thinking as well: ethical thinking is always contextually and temporally determined, and implies an engagement with uncertainty. In the previous chapter (sec. 3.1.), we saw that, for von Foerster (1990), ethics must remain implicit, hidden from all eyes. Wittgenstein (*Tractatus* 6.421) offer an even more radical view on the possibility of articulating ethics: for him, ethics must remain completely silent, since we have no language with which to deal with the ethical. These descriptions of ethics do not bode well for business ethics – both as an academic discipline and as a professional practice – because, from the above, it seems obvious that ethics cannot be institutionalised.

Although, the insights gleaned from a complex ethics requires a radical rethink of what we mean by business ethics, both Morin and Derrida are of the opinion that the complexities that characterise our lives cannot excuse us from taking action (see chap. 6, sec. 2.2.). Furthermore, if we follow Derrida in defining ethics as the interruption of ontological closure, several important and empowering insights emerge for our practices: Firstly, a complex view of ethics guards against the

ethical enterprise becoming a form of moralisation, since justice can only manifest in the singularity of the event (which implies that our practices are always subject to transformation). Secondly, because attempts to articulate ethics draw attention to the limits of our conceptual systems, ethics becomes a regulative ideal (although it remains both substantively and procedurally empty). This saves ethics from charges of ethnocentrism, relativism, and solipsism. Thirdly, ethical judgement, as guided by both moral precedent and the ideal, is possible. Ethics, on this understanding, is, therefore, politically potent, as one is able to take a stand (even though justice can never find its full expression in an action). And, finally, the fact that our immanent expressions cannot capture phenomena in their full complexity means that ethics can never be understood as a finished project. We must constantly account for the limits of our models, and, therefore, for the fact that complete understanding is continually deferred – a realisation which, ironically, also acts as the very impetus for ethics.

These complexity insights open up new possibilities of being and of thinking, and should, therefore, not be interpreted as an insurmountable hurdle, but as an opportunity. In this regard Morin (2007: 29) writes:

> complexity does not put us only in the distress of the uncertain, it allows us to see besides the probable, the possibilities of the improbable, because of those which have been put in the past and those that can be found in the future… The intelligence of complexity, isn't it to explore the field of possibilities, without restricting it with what is formally probable? Doesn't it invite us to reform, even to revolutionize?

Far from leading to inaction, complexity, therefore, compels us to action, to fight for an epistemological reformation and revolution, and to engage in politics so as to assume a position (even if this position is itself subject to critique and transformation). Therefore, it is with this goal in mind that this concluding chapter commences. The analysis of a complex ethics undertaken in chapter six yielded several important insights for our understanding of values such as moral responsibility and awareness; ethical strategy development; and, tolerance and openness. In this chapter, these values will be explored in terms of the implications that they hold for major business ethics themes (specifically, corporate citizenship/corporate social responsibility, responsible and effective leadership, and sustainability[95]); the challenges that they pose to the standard view of

[95] The reason for focusing on the above-mentioned business ethics issues is that good corporate citizenship, responsible leadership, and sustainable practices are identified as the key aspects of the King III Report (IoD, 2010: 10-11) and King III Code (IoD, 2010: 9-10) on Corporate Governance. As such, these three

business ethics; and, the implications that they hold for teaching business ethics[96]. This analysis is presented in terms of three separate cases, and is undertaken in order to show how business ethics can reform and revolutionise.

2. Case one: a complex understanding of moral responsibility and awareness: implications for understanding corporate citizenship and teaching business ethics

2.1. Corporate citizenship: more than corporate social responsibility?

The third report on corporate governance in South Africa, named after Judge Mervyn King and henceforth referred to as the King III Report or the Report, became effective on 1 March 2010. The code applies to 'entities incorporated in and resident in South Africa' (intro., para. 13), and spells out the framework for governance compliance. As mentioned in footnote 95, corporate citizenship is viewed as one of the three key issues in ensuring good business practices in the South African context and is, therefore, discussed extensively in the King III Report. In the Report (intro., para. 8.2.), it is stated that the concept of corporate citizenship 'flows from the fact that the company is a person and should operate in a sustainable manner'[97]. According to Malcolm McIntosh (2003: 28), an international figure working in the field of corporate citizenship, the term corporate citizenship (CC) implies a concern for the social, environmental, and economic performance of companies; and a concern for the role, scope, and purpose of companies. The problem with these normative motivations for CC is that they in no way extend the definition of corporate social responsibility (CSR), and also do not shed light on what corporate *citizenship* might entail (see Matten, Crane & Chapple, 2003). Indeed, McIntosh (2003: 28) views CC and CSR as synonymous terms, and explicitly states that the debate regarding the purpose of business is 'sometimes called corporate social responsibility and at other times called corporate citizenship'. In order to ascertain whether the King III Report ascribes a specific meaning to CC, we turn to a more in depth analysis of how the term is used in the Report.

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issues are seen as critical in ensuring good business practices and corporate governance in the South African context.

[96] The suggestions made in this analysis regarding the teaching of business ethics are based on a report that Morin (1999) wrote for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), entitled 'Seven complex lessons in education for the future'. In the forward to this document, Morin (1) writes that his text 'stands prior to any suggested guide or curriculum' and that '[t]he intention is simply to identify fundamental problems that are overlooked or neglected in education, and should be taught in the future.' Although these fundamental problems are contextualised in terms of business ethics, this analysis also does not provide examples of specific pedagogical interventions. The aim of this analysis is, therefore, to focus awareness on the components that should be included in any curriculum in which the complexities of business ethics are addressed, rather than to present a prescriptive or substantive framework of what such a curriculum would entail.

[97] In this analysis, the terms 'company' and 'organisation' are used interchangeably.

In viewing the company as a person, the King III Report draws attention to the fact that companies are 'social entities with both rights and responsibilities, and as such, the Bill of Rights applies to them in a manner that goes beyond mere financial considerations' (chap. 1, para. 23). These rights are reflected in the foundational values of 'dignity, freedom and equality' (chap. 1, para. 23). In this regard, the King III Report endorses not only a view of companies as legal entities, but also of companies as moral entities. Indeed, it is explicitly stated that companies have 'social *and* moral standing in societies, with all the responsibilities attached to that status' (chap. 1, para. 16) and that '[r]esponsible corporate citizenship implies an ethical relationship between the company and the society in which it operates' (chap. 1, para. 19). One could argue that extending moral responsibility to companies represents a way to start thinking about corporate citizenship (as a concept distinct from CSR). This is because such an extension entails an important step in conceptualising citizenship as active participation in a political community – which only becomes a viable notion if one is capable of making moral decisions.

Attributing moral responsibility to companies is, however, plagued by several difficulties, and a central question in the business ethics literature is whether the concept of moral responsibility can be extended to organisations and their actions. In other words, the question is: can organisations be morally responsible for their actions in the same way that individuals are? In Woermann (2010: 177), the gist of the debate is described as follows: on the one hand, it is argued that organisational systems and processes make it possible for organisations to undertake intentional actions that surpass the actions of individual corporate agents (French, 1984; French, 1979; French, Nesteruk, Risser, 1992; Erskine, 2003; and Petit, 2007). On the other hand, it is argued that organisations are incapable of undertaking moral obligations because they function like machines, and are, therefore, only able to pursue empirical objectives (Ladd 1970; Werhane, 1980); or, in a related argument, that organisations are incapable of moral motives and actions, as only biological agents can be defined as intentional agents (Keeley, 1981, 1988; Velasquez, 1983). Although the definition of intentionality may vary slightly within this debate, moral agency is – as previously argued (chap. 3, sec. 6.2.) – broadly conceptualised 'as a direct cause and effect relationship between the willing and acting agent and the consequences of his or her decisions and behavior' (Painter-Morland, 2006:90). This view of moral agency informs the dominant paradigm for thinking about concepts such as accountability, corporate social responsibility, good governance, leadership, and a number of other business ethics themes.

It does not seem that the King III Report truly supports an extended view of agency to include companies, particularly since the responsibility for corporate citizenship lies with the board[98]. Furthermore, the Report also does not seem to work with an extended definition of CC. This is because – despite the fact that it is claimed that the company 'is as much a citizen of a country as is a natural personal who has citizenship' (intro., para. 9) – it is certainly not the case that companies can exercise any social (positive) rights, or political rights (as is the case for natural citizens) (Matten et al. 2003: 114). On closer inspection, the argument seems to be that, because companies are powerful public actors, they have a responsibility to respect the rights of natural citizens in society (115). With regard to this interpretation, Matten et al. (115) argue that 'we see a tendency to collapse back into more conventional perspectives on CC [i.e. CC as an expression of CSR], albeit by referring to a new normative concept of citizenship such as the communitarian approach'.

Since the term 'corporate citizenship' is employed in a very conventional sense in the Report, and since the idea of extending the notion of citizenship (which is a political concept) to companies is itself problematic, the analysis proceeds with an understanding of corporate citizenship as an expression of – rather than an extension of – corporate social responsibility. Furthermore, it is argued that the debate of whether organisations can be seen as moral persons is a fruitless avenue to pursue further, as it is based on the mistaken premise that the identity conditions of individuals (including, intentionality, autonomy, and rationality) are *a priori* givens (Woermann, 2010: 178). Following a complexity view of identity formation, it is more profitable to view the identity of individuals and organisations as coterminous (in that our practices lead to the emergence of institutions, and our institutions serve to constrain our practices through feedback loops) (see chap. 3, sec. 6.2.). As such, the driving question should be what the emergence of corporate identity implies for our understanding of corporate social responsibility?

Lesser and Storck (in Lissack & Letiche, 2002: 78) argue that '[a] sense of identity is important because it determines how an individual directs his or her attention.' Albert, Ashforth and Dutton (in Lissack & Letiche, 2002: 79) add that '[a] sense of identity serves as a rudder for navigating difficult waters.' This implies that – in order to foster resilience, moral awareness, and responsibility – our sense of identity should neither be too insular (as is the case in the Cartesian paradigm), nor too fragmented. It is particularly this latter problem that arises in the context of the modern organisation. In this regard, McIntosh (2003: 29) writes that '[w]e live in a society of organisations *and* networks' – indeed individuals and organisations are *embedded* in various

[98] In principle 1.2., it is explicitly stated that '[t]he board should ensure that the company is and is seen to be a responsible corporate citizen'.

networks – 'and [that] this poses enormous ethical questions about 'whose values are they anyway – ours or theirs or nobody's?'

In the remainder of the analysis of this case, the insights that a complex understanding of values (specifically the values of moral responsibility and moral awareness) hold for our understanding of our corporate social responsibilities will be explored in detail. Specifically, it will be shown that rejecting the Cartesian dogma does not mean that it becomes impossible to assume individual responsibility.

2.2. Understanding moral responsibility

The traditional causal view of moral agency (which informs both the standard normative tale, and the debate on whether organisations are capable of moral agency) is also endorsed in the King III Report, as is clear from the following description of the board's responsibilities:

> The board is responsible for corporate governance and has two main functions: first it is responsible for determining the company's *strategic direction* (and, consequently, its ultimate performance); and second, it is responsible for the *control* of the company' (chap. 1; para. 7).

According to this view, the individual moral agent is further conceptualised in terms of the Cartesian dogma, wherein it is assumed that 'the "knowing" individual is understood as the architect[99] and controller of an internal and external order' (Uhl-Bien, 2006: 655). From a complexity perspective, this understanding of moral agency proves mistaken, since agents are not independent decision-makers whose actions can be evaluated according to a linear causality. Rather, as previously argued, social actors are embedded in complex networks of relations (Kramer, 1991). Therefore, the practices to which we belong strongly influence our views on the scope of our responsibilities (see chap. 2, sec. 6.3.).

Although the board of a company should assume responsibility for the given company, the board's responsibilities should not be framed in terms of control. Since individuals contribute to the instantiation of companies, individuals are important role-players in *influencing* (rather than *determining*) the strategic direction of companies, and may even serve as catalysts of transformation

[99] Board members can only reasonably be expected to *determine* the strategic direction of a company if they are seen as architects of the company.

(Grebe & Woermann, 2010). Furthermore, it stands to reason that those vested with power (for example, board members), have a greater opportunity (and, therefore, a greater responsibility) to influence the direction of companies. However, as argued in chapter three (sec. 6.2.), the actions of individuals are also always constrained by feedback loops (or downward causation). These feedback loops serve to reinforce or undermine certain patterns of behaviour, which, over time, become institutionalised in formal or informal rules, norms, policies, laws etc. (Woermann, 2010; Grebe & Woermann, 2010). This means that a group of agents, such as a board, cannot 'be isolated and be identified as *the* single cause of an event' (Painter-Morland, 2006: 90).

According to Painter-Morland (90-93), this point bears three further implications: firstly, it is impossible to fully articulate in language the tacit understanding that corporate agents have of the way in which they function, or are supposed to function. Secondly, it is impossible for any single corporate actor 'to 'step out' of the web of unarticulated expectations, obligations and pressures that make an organizational culture what is, in order to change or challenge it' (92). And, thirdly, even if it were possible for any single corporate actor to fully identify all the aspects that determine a given organisation's iterative themes, identity, or culture, this information would immediately feed back into the system and produce a number of new and unpredictable effects on the behaviour of employees. These implications are reinforced by Derrida's (1979) analysis of writing, meaning, and context (see chap. 5, sec. 3.3.2.), where he argues that writing moves out from the word, resulting in a proliferation of meaning that cannot be controlled. Therefore, as previously argued, a complex view of moral agency – like writing – cannot be construed as the outcome of an intentional, causal process. This is because the original intentions of the moral agent start to disappear as soon as decisions and actions are disseminated through the network.

In terms of a board, one can argue that – given a complexity understanding – the ethical responsibilities of the board and (indeed, to a lesser extent) of every organisational member requires a keen awareness of how their actions affect others, and of how their actions *influence* the direction of the company.

2.3. Accounting for stakeholders

The first point (i.e. that organisations should nurture awareness of how organisational actions influence others) is supported by both the analysis undertaken in chapter five, and by the King III Report. In the Report (intro., para. 9), it is specifically argued that the '*[i]nclusivity* of stakeholders

is essential to achieving sustainability and the legitimate interests and expectations of stakeholders must be taken into account in decision-making and strategy.'

Given a complexity perspective of identity formation, it is sensible to follow Painter-Morland (2008: 225) in arguing that we are accountable *towards* those who co-constitute the network of relations to which we belong, as opposed to being merely accountable *for* the causal effects of our actions. The former represents a legal understanding of business responsibility, which amounts to a form of blame responsibility; whereas the latter represents an obligation responsibility (in that, to fail to act appropriately is to fail *someone*). In this regard, Painter-Morland (226) draws on the etymology of the word 'responsibility', arguing that in Latin, *respondre* means to answer, or to promise in return (pledge back) to those with whom one associates.

From a complexity perspective, it is also important to consider what 'association' with other implies. The primary focus of the standard normative tale is 'on the agent committing the actions, not the object (or patient) receiving those actions' (Siponen, 2004: 281). The standard normative tale is, therefore, anthropocentric, logocentric, and egocentric (Floridi, 1999: 42). Translated into organisational terms, this would imply an emphasis on the organisation or company, rather than on the stakeholders (who are affected and influenced by the organisation's actions). Such a view creates the impression that organisations occupy the central position on stakeholder maps, which implies both that the organisation interacts freely with stakeholders on its own terms, and that it operates as a self-contained entity (Painter-Morland, 2006:90).

From the complexity point of view, we are co-constituted over time in a societal network of relations. It is interesting to note that the King III Report (chap. 1, para. 21) touches on this point in emphasising the concept of Ubuntu, 'which is captured in the expression 'uMuntu ngumuntu ngabantu', 'I am because you are; you are because we are''. It is further stated that, in the African context, 'moral duties find their expression in the concept of Ubuntu', however, no further attention is given to the consequences that Ubuntu holds for our understanding of moral duty, and in the rest of the Report the traditional Western view of agency and intentionality is assumed (as previously argued).

If we take a complexity (and Ubuntu) view of identity formation seriously, then critical questions regarding the logical and linear demarcation of agent-patient remain unsolvable – to recall the words of Derrida (1995b: 285), 'we never know, and never have known, how to *cut up* a subject.' We are continually appropriating each other through our verbal and physical relations. Therefore,

one needs to consider this complex, asymmetrical reciprocity between beings, in order to determine 'the best, most respectful, most grateful, and also most giving way of relating to the other and of relating the other to the self' (281-282) (see chap. 6, sec. 3.1.). This necessitates a complex thinking, which requires not only a move beyond agent-centred ethics, but also a move beyond biocentric and patient-orientated ethics, which 'is centred on, and interested in, the entity itself that received the action, rather than its relation to or relevance to the agent' (Floridi, 1999: 42). From the perspective of a complexity-centred ethics, one must think the inextricable *relation* between self and other (see chap. 3, sec. 5.2.1.), whilst simultaneously respecting the other's difference – not only in terms of manifest differences, but also in terms of differences that cannot be thought within our conceptual models.

Stakeholder theorists, such as Edward Freeman, have done important work in drawing attention to the groups (beyond shareholders) that affect and are affected by company actions. However, given this analysis, one can conclude that it is not only important to take cognisance of these groups, but also to account for the *type* of relations that emerge between companies and stakeholder groups. Freeman and Philips (2002: 336-340) view these relations in terms of value-creating exercises (which are defined as voluntary agreements that are the product of cooperating free wills). As such, stakeholder relations that cannot easily be accommodated in Freeman's model are largely ignored. Much work, therefore, still needs to be done in order to find ways to account for disenfranchised, dispossessed, and distant stakeholders, who rarely feature in the board's thinking. In Badiou's (2009) terms: one must try to account for the *inexistant* – an act which is undermined by the monstration of a conceptual slippage (141) that we can never overcome (see chap. 6, sec. 4.2.1.), and by the face of the third (which necessitates a decision, even though such a decision will necessarily lead to the suppression on an other) (see chap. 5, sec. 7.2.).

2.3.1. Pedagogical implications

The above analysis helps to debunk the notion that 'it is easy to be ethical', and that individuals automatically know when they are faced with ethical problems, and how they should overcome the problems (Trevino & Brown, 2004: 70). As Trevino and Brown (70) note: 'Rarely do decisions come with waving red flags that say, "Hey, I am an ethical issue. Think about me in moral terms!"' Research has, however, shown that 'moral judgment processes are not initiated unless the decision-maker recognizes the ethical nature of an issue' (70). Furthermore, a review of research on cognitive complexity (interpretation of Streufert & Nogami in Swenson & Rigoni, 1999: 577) indicates that less cognitively complex persons tend 'to engage in search behaviour less when there

was an information overload.' A willingness to consider ethical problems from complex perspectives is, in part, influenced by learning. What this implies is that business ethicists should concentrate on fostering moral awareness with regard to the nature of our interdependent human existence; which, in turn, leads to awareness of the fact that all our decisions and actions are, in effect, characterised by a normative component (see chap. 2, sec. 6.2.).

In order to facilitate a broadened understanding of our responsibilities towards one another, business ethicists should develop strategies that centre on teaching pertinent knowledge and raising awareness of the human condition. Morin (1999: 15) identifies pertinent knowledge as an important component of education for the future. He argues that pertinent knowledge in education should confront complexity, especially the type of complexity that arises when various elements (e.g. economic, political, sociological, psychological, ethical etc.) that compose a whole are inseparable. Pertinent knowledge is, therefore, knowledge of the complex 'inter-retroactive, interactive, interdependent tissue between the parts and the whole, the whole and the parts, [and] the parts amongst themselves' (15). In a business ethics context, pertinent knowledge implies a focus on the coterminous formation of individual and corporate identities, corporate identities and socio-cultural identities, and the ethical implications that arise from a broadened understanding of our work practices. In this regard, it is important not to succumb to the principle of reductionism, or of holism, but rather to think both the similarities and differences between parts and whole (see chap. 3, sec. 4.3.). A focus on such knowledge fosters cognitive complexity, which helps individuals to 'tolerate apparent inconsistencies and conflicts in information, avoid extreme judgments, more accurately predict outcomes, avoid dualistic categorizing, search for more diverse information, and entertain more questions about an event' (interpretation of Streufert & Nogami in Swenson & Rigoni, 1999: 577).

A further outcome of the above teaching strategy would be to generate 'reciprocal commiseration from each to each and from all to all' (Morin, 1999: 39). This is because acknowledging the complexity of the human condition implies an abandonment of the arrogant and egocentric implications that arise from subscribing to the Cartesian dogma, where humans are seen as isolated actors and decision-makers. Business ethics should, therefore, become a subject that contributes to teaching an ethics of not only inter-personal understanding, but also planetary understanding, in which the various dimensions of globalisation (including the role of global business) are conceptualised in terms of service for mankind (54). In order to facilitate this strategy, Morin recommends that the following two aspects be incorporated into our teaching:

- Methods ‘of grasping mutual relations and reciprocal influences between parts and the whole in a complex world’ (2).
- Restoring awareness of the fact that ‘[h]umans are physical, biological, psychological, cultural, social, and historical beings’ so that ‘every person, wherever he might be, can become aware of both his complex identity and his shared identity with all other human beings’ (2).

The above aspects help to draw attention to the embeddedness of our realities, or the fact that ‘[t]here is nothing outside of the text’ (Derrida, 1976: 163). This necessitates that we also work through the complexities that arise from our relations with one another, including the fact that, although we have a shared identity (characterised by the dialogics of our two-getherness (Buber, in von Foerster, 1990)), our differences cannot be assimilated. In this regard, we function as ‘antagonistic terms’ that are ‘necessarily coupled’ (Morin, 1992: 373; see chap. 3, sec. 4.3.; chap. 6, sec. 3). Deconstruction – defined as an ever-renewed quest to safeguard difference – is vital in allowing us to fully appreciate the implications of what it means to think on our double-identity. This is because engaging in deconstruction implies working on two fronts simultaneously: we must take seriously our shared and dominant traditions, whilst displacing these traditions, in order to open up our systems of meaning to differences not previously considered (see chap. 4, sec. 2.2.1.). In the context of CSR and stakeholder theory, a complex notion of responsibility helps us to move beyond the traditional predicates of responsibility (defined as an equalising justice), and further aids us in thinking about responsibility as an expression of ethical complexity (see chap. 5, sec. 4.3.). Even though the implications arising from the complex nature of our myriad interactions and associations with one another can never fully be grasped, our responsibility resides in the attempt to continually account for the incalculable possibilities and consequences that our actions hold for ourselves and for others.

2.4. Accounting for a company’s strategic direction

Despite the important insights that emerge from the above analysis, organisational members (including boards) are not only responsible towards stakeholders, but also have to take responsibility for the manner in which their actions influence the direction of ‘their’ companies. In other words, members of an organisation must acknowledge the impact that they have on what Grebe and Woermann (2010) refer to as ‘institutions of integrity’, and the ‘integrity of institutions’. ‘Institutions of integrity’ represent the structurally and contextually-determined norms and codes that 'bind' individual behaviour. These norms and codes are, in part, based on underlying normative

principles, but also emerge from contextually-defined practices. The 'integrity of institutions', on the other hand, is understood as 'correct functioning' and fitness for purpose – which, in the case of companies, refers to the company's ability to ethically and effectively achieve its goals.

With regard to 'institutions of integrity', the board and other appropriately placed organisational members have a duty to exercise responsible leadership, which will be discussed in section 3. As will be argued, responsible leadership is partially characterised by a leader's values. However, a large part of responsible leadership also has to do with a leader's ability to build alliances between people, ideas, or technologies and promote collaborative efforts; foster normative congruence or coherence, so that – despite conflict and dissensus amongst stakeholders – institutional processes do not lose their functional unity or sense of purpose; and, to display an attitude of openness, modesty, and critical (self)-reflexivity (see Grebe & Woermann, 2010). These dimensions of ethical leadership will be returned to later. At this stage, however, it is important to note that 'institutions of integrity' (i.e. our contextually-defined practices) have a large influence on the 'integrity of institutions' (i.e. whether organisations display fitness for purpose).

An important element in ensuring fitness for purpose is organisational openness. Instead of being viewed as 'core, distinctive and enduring' (Albert & Whetten in Lissack & Letiche, 2002: 81), organisational identity should rather be conceptualised in terms of 'the stability of the labels used by organizational members to express who or what they believe the organization to be' (Gioia, Schultz & Corley in Lissack & Letiche, 2002: 81-82). Although these labels tend to be relatively durable, it is important that organisational members engage in dialogue regarding organisational change, emergence, boundaries and indexicals (Lissack & Letiche, 2002: 79). In other words, organisational members should recognise, and take responsibility for the fact that – to a large extent – their corporate identities are the product of a certain strategy or *bricolage* (see chap. 6, sec. 4.3.), so as to ensure that their organisational identities and practices remain open enough to respond to, and deal with, complexities[100].

Cilliers (2010b: 58) argues that no capacity for complex behaviour exists within a fully-constrained system. Therefore, when a certain work practice is no longer robust enough to cope with its operating environment, or when it causes destructive conflicts, it is – as Jane Collier and Rafael Esteban (1999:176) warn – a sure sign to start planning as 'open systems' in order to survive. Planning as open systems does not present a once-off organisational intervention, but is a process of

[100] The following three paragraphs are, in part, based on the argument presented in Woermann, 2010: 181-184.

continual re-organisation (177) in an effort to create greater flexibility, and organisational robustness or resilience, where resilience is defined as an organisation's capacity to deal with stress and promote 'learning, self-organization, and adaptation at multiple scales' (Lissack & Letiche, 2002: 82). Michael Lissack and Hugo Letiche (82) further argue that an organisation's capacity for resilience is determined by the structure of the system, and the interactions between the components of a system; as well by organisational perceptions regarding change (especially unexpected emergent events). From this description, one can deduce that more 'loosely coupled' organisational structures are better able to deal with current concerns such as globalisation, increased communication possibilities, technological change, financial innovation, freer trade possibilities, and heightened competition for market share (Collier & Esteban, 1999: 176).

Opening up work practices and creating greater organisational flexibility demands both that work practices be aligned with organisational purpose, and that organisations be more responsive to environmental complexities and contingencies. In other words, boards and organisational members must seek to (re-)establish a sense of normative congruence within the organisation, as well as between the organisation and the environment. In order to (re-) establish normative congruence within organisations, organisational members must recognise that 'people are not merely 'part of' the organization, but actually 'take part' in every aspect of its existence' (177). Lissack and Letiche (2002: 84) use the term 'coherence' to explain this sense of normative congruence or organisational purpose, stating that:

> It implies a shared meaning and signifying apparatus of some rigor and sustainability. Coherence may be temporary, but it is not entirely fleeting. It demands robustness, just as the fate of the modern organization or team demands resilience. It takes a special kind of coherence to provide that robustness; that is, *the coherence of preparedness, of identity, of action.* Such coherence entails being prepared to engage in dialog.

Actively engaging in dialogue is important in generating a shared sense of meaning, and in facilitating relationships with internal and external stakeholders. The coherence of preparedness, of identity, and of action implies both that accountability and responsibility is shared by all organisational members (since coherence is fostered by dialogue), and that organisations should seek to redefine their relationship with the environment as one of symbiosis and adaptation (Collier & Esteban, 1999: 177), rather than disjuncture and otherness (this is because organisational actions need to be congruent with environmental forces if organsations wish to be resilient).

In order to help facilitate the development of resilient, coherent organisations – and, therefore, of institutions of integrity and of the integrity of institutions – boards and organisational members must be ethically aware, which is critical in planning as open systems, in avoiding blame-shifting and apathy, in promoting an extended view of our actions, and in nurturing an understanding of the nature of our models and strategies (including models and strategies pertaining to CSR/CC). Indeed, as stated in the King III Report (chap. 1, para. 30), '[t]here is no uniform or universally applicable approach to responsible citizenship programmes.' Therefore, '[a]s a responsible citizen, each company should develop its own policies to define and guide its activities'.

The success with which we fulfil our responsibilities is related to our ability to critically and creatively reflect upon (and, if need be, to modify) our conceptual models (which in turn, affect our practices). In other words, we need to recognise that our models are largely contingent upon the resources at our disposal, and that we employ framing strategies when describing our systems (Cilliers, 2001). As argued in chapter three (sec. 6.1.), these framing strategies do not constitute objective descriptions of reality, but are, to a large part, the outcome of judgement and convenience. Living with irony (as opposed to feigning objective certainty) makes it easier to accept the provisional status of our models, and to continuously evaluate this status in order to prevent our models from becoming naturalised (and thus closed-off to alternative ways of being) (see chap. 6, sec. 4.3.; chap. 4, sec. 2.1.1.). Therefore, as stated in chapter five (sec. 8), it is imperative we attempt to nurture the type of organisational identities that allow us to understand and reinscribe our responsibilities in larger, more powerful, and more stratified contexts (Derrida, 1988a).

Being morally aware and engaging with our responsibilities also necessitates that we take cognisance of the fact that organisational coherence may be temporary, and that our decisions and actions are subject to risks, hazards, derailments and transformations (Morin, 2008) – all of which impact upon the integrity of our institutions. In this regard, moral responsibility implies facing up to uncertainty, dealing with matters beyond the present (even if our long term perspectives are inherently flawed), and being flexible and responsive enough to try and correct decisions and actions with undesirable consequences (see chap. 6, sec. 4.2.2.) In this regard, moral responsibility implies a degree of courage, as argued in the King III Report (chap. 1, para. 15.5).

2.4.1. Pedagogical implications

In showing how our actions impact on 'institutions of integrity', and the 'integrity of institutions', the above analysis helps to further dispel the myth that being ethical is easy, since such a notion

also ignores the impact that our work practices and identities have on our views of our moral responsibilities (see Trevino & Brown, 2004: 71). Furthermore, the analysis also serves as a challenge to the commonly accepted view that unethical behaviour in business is simply the result of 'bad apples' (72). Although Trevino and Brown (72) concede that there are bad actors, they argue that 'most people are the product of the context they find themselves in. They tend to "look up and look around," and they do what others around them do or expect them to do.' In order to promote ethical work environments, business ethicists should concentrate on fostering moral awareness with regard to the challenges that arise from our understanding of our organisations, of our organisational actions, and of ourselves – as organisational members.

The above implies that business ethicists should develop teaching strategies that allow students and future practitioners to understand how their work practices influence, and are influenced by a larger internal and external operating environment; and, to deal with the uncertainties that characterise decision-making, and the unpredictable consequences that arise from our actions.

With regard to this first point, Morin (1999: 14) argues that another important dimension of pertinent knowledge concerns an understanding of the multi-dimensionality of human experiences, which means that we should not isolate the parts from the whole, or isolate the parts from each other in our thinking. If a discipline such as business ethics operates as a self-enclosed realm (taught in isolation to other subjects), then the mind begins to lose its natural aptitude 'to contextualize knowledge and integrate it into its natural entities' (16). In Montuori's (1996: 58) words: 'The segmented, fragmented organization of education into small compartments, each engaged in the study of a rigidly defined discipline, leads to blinkered assembly-line over-specialization.' Applied to the business context, this means that business activities will be viewed as standing apart from the totality of systems to which they in actual fact belong. The fragmentation of knowledge has detrimental consequences, in that '[a] weakened perception of the global leads to a weakened sense of responsibility (each individual tends to be responsible solely for his specialized task) and weakened solidarity (each individual loses the feeling of his ties to fellow citizens)' (Morin, 1999: 16)[101].

[101] In this regard, consider the following example: In 1973, a behavioural scientist, David Frew, undertook a study, which illustrated the 'ecologically schizophrenic' behaviour of employees who worked for a corporation that was known as a substantial polluter. He found that although each of the corporate members recognised and deplored the corporation's polluting activities, they nevertheless willingly contributed on a daily basis to the problem through their work practices. A possible reason for this could be the way in which work practices are delineated. In terms of this example, broadening the perceived scope of the workers' practices would imply a concession that they are both employees and community members, and that their work identities (which are formed through practice) cannot be incongruent with their community identities. (The above description is taken from Grebe & Woermann, 2010.)

Morin (17) further argues that '[f]ragmented, compartmentalized, mechanized, disjunctive, reductionist intelligence... is nearsighted and often goes blind.' By this he means that since individuals are unable to grasp a problem in its entirety, they are also unlikely to engage in reflection, meaning that 'the chances of corrective judgement or a long term view are drastically reduced.' Morin (17) draws on economics as an example of a field that has become extremely specialised (indeed, it is the mathematically most advanced social science), yet remains a 'humanly backward science'. The reason for this is precisely because 'it has abstracted itself from the social, historical, political, psychological, and ecological conditions inseparable from economic activity' (17).

If we wish to successfully deal with complex systems, we must engage in complex thought so as to foster robustness, resilience, and coherence. With regard to the second point (i.e. learning to deal with organisational uncertainties), the ability to engage in complex thought is also necessity. This is because we can only take cognisance of the wager involved in a decision, and implement (and when necessary, modify) a strategy, when we confront the complexities of our systems. Complex thought allows us to surmount short or medium term uncertainties, whilst remaining vigilant of the fact that we cannot claim to have eliminated uncertainty in the long term (47).

In order to promote multidimensionality in thought, and the cultivation of robust strategies, business ethicists should:

- Encourage learning that will assist students to 'grasp subjects within their contexts, their complex, their totality' (1). This requires both that lecturers teaching business and economic studies draw attention to the ethical dimensions of their subjects, and that business ethicists contextualise their subject in terms of wider business realities. As such, it is necessary to cultivate a stronger interdisciplinary focus in business ethics, since how we conceptualise of our practices affects the perceived scope of our identities.
- Forsake determinist and reductive views of ethics, in which it is assumed that future consequences of actions can be predicted, and that our identities are static. Instead, we should work on preparing minds to engage with complexity, to expect the unexpected, and to confront it through means of strategy development and dialogue.

For Morin (3), it is imperative that '[e]very person who takes on educational responsibilities must be ready to go to the forward posts of uncertainty in our times.' To this one can add that, despite the uncertainty, every person taking on educational responsibilities should also focus attention on the

potential coherence (defined as a by-product of resilience or robustness (Lissack & Letiche, 2002: 82)) that can emerge when role players show 'a preparedness to engage in dialogue'[102] (85; italicised in original), and to grasp subjects in their totality. This reaffirms the point made in chapter two (sec. 6.1.) that limited knowledge does not amount to any knowledge. Uncertainty is not an excuse for inaction or for assuming a relativist position. Rather, uncertainty compels us to work harder, to engage further, and to find robust and workable solutions in the absence of meta-frameworks (see chap. 2, sec. 6.1.). In this regard, the role of leaders is essential in nurturing a sense of community, and in guiding the process of organisational becoming or identity formation. As such, effective, responsible leadership forms the focus of the second case.

3. Case two: A complex understanding of tolerance and openness: implications for understanding effective, responsible leadership and teaching business ethics

In the King III Report (chap. 1, para. 1), it is stated that '[g]ood corporate governance is essentially about effective, responsible leadership.' According to the Report (chap. 1, para. 2-6), this involves building sustainable business; reflecting on the role of business in society; doing business ethically (which also implies valuing personal and institutional ethical fitness, and practicing corporate statesmanship); not compromising the natural environment or intergenerational welfare; and, embracing a shared future with all the company's stakeholders. These are indeed noble goals, and in order to appreciate how responsible leadership can aid in achieving these goals, it is first necessary to gain a general understanding of what both leadership and ethical leadership entail.

Mary Uhl-Bien (2006: 655) distinguishes between two broad leadership orientations, namely: the more traditional orientation, which she refers to as the 'entity' perspective; and the less-known orientation (currently gaining prominence), which she refers to as the 'relational' perspective. Whereas the former perspective focuses on leaders as independent, discrete entities (i.e. as individual agents); the latter view focuses on leadership as a socially constructed and distributed phenomenon (655), and has, therefore, also been referred to as distributed leadership (Bennett, Wise, Woods & Harvey, 2003) and systemic leadership (Collier & Esteban, 2000; Painter-Morland, 2008)[103].

[102] In section 3.2., the conditions necessary to successfully engage in dialogue will be discussed.
[103] This paragraph and the following two sections are based on Woermann's contribution to Grebe and Woermann's (2010) scoping paper, entitled: 'Institutions of integrity and the integrity of institutions: integrity and ethics in the politics of developmental leadership'.

3.1. The entity or agential perspective on leadership

With regard to the entity or agential perspective, Uhl-Bien (2006: 655) writes that leadership is treated in terms of the Cartesian dogma. Translated into leadership terms, this means that leaders can exercise influence and control over followers, and, thereby mobilise people and resources. In this perspective, 'organizational life is viewed as the result of individual action' (Hosking, Dachler & Gergen, 1995: x), and it believed that it is primarily those in the top echelon of the corporate hierarchy who are in position to determine organisational life (see Painter-Morland, 2008: 179). The entity perspective can be divided into a normative interpretation (which focuses on what a leader 'ought' to do) and a descriptive or social scientific interpretation (which focuses on what leaders do).

The traditional understanding of responsible leadership is applicable to the normative interpretation of the entity perspective; since, within this orientation, emphasis is placed on the ethical qualities and standards demanded of ethical leaders. In this regard, authentic leadership (Aviolio, Luthans, & Wlaumbwa, 2004; Luthans & Aviolio, 2003), spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003; Reave, 2005; Fry, Vitucci, & Cedillo, 2005), transformational leadership (Burns, 1978), and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) are all examples of leadership theories that address the moral potential of leaders. Within this perspective, it is generally assumed that individual leaders embody virtuous character traits, including integrity. In the business ethics literature, integrity is commonly understood as 'the quality of moral self-governance' (Paine, 1994: 225), moral 'wholeness' (Solomon, 1992b: 109), honesty in the wide sense of the word (Dalla Costa, 1998: 191), or as a set of consistently displayed characteristics (Gostick & Telford, 2003).

Brown and Trevino (2006) are proponents of the descriptive approach, and are critical of these normative leadership theories, as they claim that these theories cannot account for the 'transactional' or 'behavioural' aspects of leadership i.e. the proactive influence that leaders have on the ethical/unethical conduct of followers in the context of work processes (600). In the descriptive approach, the focus is on the leader's influence on followers as relayed via communication and accountability processes (600). Schein (1985), an early supporter of the descriptive approach, maintains that, in this regard, aspects such as the issues that capture the leader's attention, a leader's values during crisis situations, the behavioural example set by a leader in terms of condoning or condemning unethical behaviour, the reward structures, and the selection and dismissal processes all convey what is acceptable behaviour within a given work forum or

institution[104]. One can, therefore, conclude that leadership processes – and not only leader character traits – can serve to reinforce or undermine the ethicality of a given organisational or institutional culture.

Although the descriptive orientation goes some way towards overcoming the weakness identified in the normative approach (i.e. that the normative approach cannot account for actual leader-follower behaviours), this approach is itself too focused on the individual, who still represents a formally-constituted locus of control (Painter-Morland, 2008). As argued earlier in this study (see chap. 2, sec. 3), in the messy business of real life, the normative and the descriptive dimensions cannot be kept neatly apart, and the ethical example set by leaders – although influential on followers' behaviour – does not determine followers' behaviour. In remaining within the Cartesian dogma, the entity perspective is too agent-centric to adequately deal with the complexities that define organisational life. Conceptualising leadership within this paradigm, therefore, does not provide much insight as to how one should go about achieving the goals of effective, responsible leadership (as defined in the King III Report).

3.2. The relational or systemic perspective on leadership

In contrast to the entity or agential perspective, the relational or systemic perspective on leadership is more sensitive to the human and contextual complexities that influence the leadership process. In this approach, the focus is on both the interdependent and dynamic relations between stakeholders, as well as on the contextual contingencies that impact upon these relations. As such, a "relational" orientation starts with processes and not persons, and views persons, leadership, and other relational

[104] Sims and Brinkmann (2003: 247-251) employ Schein's model in order to illustrate how the leadership practices in Enron served to create an organisational culture that was focused on accruing profits at all costs. Firstly, the issues that capture the leader's attention will also capture the attention of the greater organisation, and of the employees. At Enron executives' attention was focused on profit, power, greed and influence. Secondly, a crisis tests a leader's true values, and brings these values to the fore. When Enron was found out, leaders reacted by shifting blame and pointing fingers. Thirdly, role-modelling refers to the behavioural example that leaders set in terms of tolerating unethical behaviour. Enron's executives did not set a good example in living the company's values of communication, respect integrity, and excellence. To the contrary, they broke the law in their use of creative partnerships called special purpose entities. Fourthly, rewards signal to others what is necessary in order to succeed in an organisation. The reward system at Enron was premised on a 'win-at-all-costs' focus, and a former Enron vice-president was quoted as saying: 'the moral of the story is break the rules, you can cheat, you can lie, but as long as you make money, it's all right' (250; see: Schwartz, 2002). Lastly, a leader's decision with regard to whom to recruit or dismiss signals his values to all employees. Kenneth Lay and Jeffery Skilling sought to hire the best and the smartest people, who embodied the same beliefs that they were trying to instill, namely: 'aggressiveness, greed, a will to win at all costs, and an appreciation for circumventing rules' (Sims & Brinkmann, 2003: 251). Employees who were unable or unwilling to conform to these values, and who did not produce results were humiliated in a public forum, and redeployed or fired. (The above description is taken from Grebe & Woermann, 2010.)

realities as emergent properties of a system (see Hosking, 2007; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Collier & Esteban, 2000). In this perspective, leadership is:

> the systematic capability, diffused throughout the organization and nurtured by its members, of finding organizational direction, of generating and maintaining continual renewal by encouraging, harnessing and directing creative and innovative capabilities, while simultaneously holding in tension the processes of responsiveness to the environment on the one hand, and maintenance of internal integrity of purpose on the other (Collier & Esteban, 2000: 208).

A major strength of the relational perspective (henceforth referred to as the systemic leadership model) is that the individual moral agent does not form the central point of this perspective. The integrity of leadership processes are not driven by the person of the leader, but must be conceptualised as 'an ongoing direction-finding process, which is innovative and continually emergent' (208). This point implies that individual leaders do not have *a priori* knowledge of what ought, morally-speaking, to be the case. This is because our identities (and our sense of right and wrong) emerge in, and through our practices. We can, therefore, never be a hundred percent sure of the 'rightness' of our actions, since there is no external yardstick against which to measure the ethicality of these actions. Consequently, ethical leadership is related to the *quality* of the arguments that we provide for undertaking certain actions (see chap. 2, sec. 6.1.; chap. 3, sec. 6.2.). Otherwise stated, ethical, systemic leadership guides the process of becoming and nurtures a sense of community, through focusing attention on the implications and consequences of our decisions and actions (which, in turn, shape our identities) (Wenger, 1998: 191).

In the systemic perspective, it is recognised that people have different capabilities, and that leadership roles and responsibilities are not static, but shift between people, as the situation requires[105] (Collier & Esteban, 2000: 209; see Kelly & Allison, 1998). What this means is that

[105] As an example, consider Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey's (2007: 306-307; 309) distinction between administrative, adaptive, and enabling leadership: administrative leadership refers to the activities of individuals who occupy formal managerial roles, and who are, therefore, responsible for planning and coordinating organisational or institutional activities (i.e. they assume a bureaucratic function). In contrast to administrative leadership, adaptive leadership is an emergent, complex dynamic, 'which originates in struggles among agents and groups over conflicting needs, ideas, or preferences; it results in movements, alliances of people, ideas or technologies, and cooperative efforts' (306). Although adaptive leadership involves people, it is not embodied in people. However, Uhl-Bien et al. (306) still identify it as a leadership dynamic since it is the proximal source of change in an organisation or institution. Lastly, the role of enabling leadership (309) is to facilitate the conditions that catalyse adaptive leadership. Enabling leaders also facilitate the inevitable entanglement between administrative and adaptive leadership. This involves 'using authority (where applicable), access to resources, and influence to keep the formal and informal organizational systems working in tandem rather than counter to one another' (311; see: Dougherty, 1996).

leadership is distributed. Distributed leadership can be understood in two ways: Firstly, the common, numerical understanding of distributed leadership views the leadership function as dispersed amongst some, many, or all members of an organisation (Wenger, 2000: 231). On this reading, distributed leadership is the sum of the attributed influence. Secondly, distributed leadership can be understood as joint or concertive action (Gronn, 2003: 35). Distributed leadership, as concertive action, implies that (35):

- There are collaborative models of engagement that arise spontaneously in the workplace
- There is the intuitive understanding that develops as part of close working relations between colleagues
- There are a number of structural relations and institutionalised arrangements which constitute attempts to regularise distributed actions

This latter understanding of distributed leadership accords well with a complexity-view of organisations, since it not only accounts for the fact that the leadership function is stretched across individuals in the organisation, but also for the fact that organisational nodes or coalitions emerge which can play an influential role in determining the direction of the organisation (see chap. 3, sec. 5.2.). Several important insights pertaining to the constituents of responsible leadership emerge from the above analysis.

If one defines leadership as concertive action, then the qualities demanded of individual leaders include flexibility and adaptability, a willingness to engage in constructive conflict, and the ability to foster active participation amongst organisational members and stakeholders. Although not every leader can be a transformational leader, stakeholder actions have systemic impacts, and leaders must manage these actions and take responsibility for the effects that these actions have on the organisational structure as a whole. Individual leaders, therefore, have the important task of balancing organisational structures with the interests of individual stakeholders. In complex organisations, where interests compete with one another, resources are limited, and effects not fully predictable, this is a crucial, yet difficult task. Indeed, Lissack and Letiche (2002: 86) report that the bulk of managers with whom they have dealt 'are searching for means of reconciling the tension

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All three leadership types are operative in one organisation. However, sometimes one of these types will take precedence over another, and in some cases may even involve a pragmatic reversal of roles between those who occupy authoritarian positions in the formal hierarchy, and those who answer to them (Painter-Morland, 2008: 224).

between the world of mission, vision, and strategy, and that of change and self.'[106] Lissack and Letiche (86) further argue that such managers are striving for what they term 'experiential coherence', which is 'a way of holding complex circumstances together and of it resonating.'

Effective, responsible leadership generates several paradoxes, not least of which is the fact that, although leadership is the responsibility of all, it is exercised only by one person at a time (see Collier & Esteban, 2000: 212-213). Part of responsible leadership implies knowing when to step down, in order to give others a chance to lead. In other words, leaders must take note of the implications that follow from a Derridean (2002a) analysis of hierarchy and authority, where it is shown that – although we cannot do without hierarchies and authorities – they, nevertheless, remain conceptual and political constructions in need of deconstruction, so as to allow for qualitative differences and requisite variety to blossom (see chap. 4, sec. 2.1.1.) Leaders will only be aware of the effects of organisational hierarchies (including the effects of their own position within the hierarchy) if they practice deep openness, which is both participative (in terms of sharing information that generates dialogue and questioning), and self-reflective (in terms of being prepared to challenge one's own convictions and presuppositions) (209).

Another paradox of systemic leadership is that it 'works with the unity of purpose, but with a diversity of ideas and interests, so that conflict is inevitable' (212). Effective, responsible leaders are, therefore, also capable of showing the necessary humour (irony) for dealing with conflict, as well as creating an environment in which constructive conflict can emerge. Such an environment tends to be trusting, supportive, and caring, since it is only within generative contexts that organisational members feel comfortable enough to 'take personal risks, express fears and hopes, critique structure of domination, and envision alternatives' (Montuori, 1996: 60). Effective, responsible leaders are, therefore, tolerant. As was explained in chapter six (sec. 4.4.), tolerance implies the acceptance of human complexity, and the ability to allow many different lifestyles to flourish together within a societal network. Morin (1999: 54) writes that:

> True tolerance is not generalized scepticism or indifference to ideas. Tolerance implies that we have convictions and faith, make ethical choices, and at the same time accept the rights of others to express different or even opposite choices, convictions, and ideas.

[106] Note the similarities between this management tension and the tension that exists between ethics and politics, where politics requires affirmation and position, and ethics requires vigilance and openness (Derrida, 2002e; see chap. 5, sec. 7.2.).

In the organisational context, tolerance allows for difference and dissensus, without losing focus of the organisation's purpose. Practicing true tolerance goes hand-in-hand with exercising moral imagination, which manifests in 'pluralistic processes in which multiple actors with opposing moral viewpoints interact, and [where] no single actor is in control' (Hargrave, 2009: 90). The challenge is to recognise and integrate contradictory moral viewpoints. This is only possible if we are capable of imagining possibilities for living other than our own, and of being open enough to allow these possibilities to transform the frameworks that we employ when apprehending the world (Cilliers, 2005; see chap. 6, sec. 4.4.).

To lead effectively requires the exercise of power. However, the traditional notion of leaders and followers (which assumes that power derives from formal authority and flows unidirectionally) is not tenable in a complex system. This is because many centres of both formal and informal power exist in organisations, and power is distributed or dispersed across levels. Therefore, in order for leaders to be effective, they must harness institutional and systemic resources. This requires that they pay attention to emergent organisational narratives. Lissack and Letiche (2002: 91) explicitly argue that '[m]anagers who attend to the affordances of the narratives that make up their environment can perhaps make a difference – to their teams, their organizations, and themselves.' A reason for why taking cognisance of corporate themes is so important is because it represents a way of attaining 'stakeholder buy-in'. Leaders must 'sell' strategies to stakeholders; however, these strategies must also resonate with stakeholders, since not taking account of stakeholder concerns undermines organisational coherence, and can have systemically-detrimental effects. This again requires that leaders take cognisance of the status of their models. As argued in chapter three (sec. 6.1.), models function like novels to the extent that they ring true to our experiences (Oreskes et al., 1994). Organisational models that are not compatible with the experiences of organisational members, will not find salience within the organisation. In developing successful models, leaders must, therefore, build alliances between people, ideas, or technologies, and foster collaborative efforts. However, in order for leadership to be both effective and responsible, leaders must also take responsibility for the consequences of their actions (they are accountable for the effects that their actions have on stakeholders), even though these effects are not fully predictable. As such, the integrity of end goals must be evaluated both in terms of how these goals are established, and the intended and unintended consequences of actions taken towards these goals.

Again, we see the importance of openness and tolerance in this process: if leaders are not willing to engage in dialogue and account for the emergent themes that arise from the complexity that defines organisational relations, or if leaders are only willing to attend to 'those aspects that "fit" some

preconceived picture' (Lissack & Letiche, 2002: 91), then leadership strategies are doomed to fail. This means that leaders are unlikely to achieve the goals ascribed to effective, responsible leadership in the King III Report. However, if leaders 'can guide those narratives, or even attend to them, purposive intervention regarding the selection among adjacent possibilities has a much better chance of achieving fruitation' (91). Here again we see the importance of taking cognisance of qualitative differences and of deconstructing conceptual paradigms, in order to ensure that organisational hierarchies do not becomes naturalised, fixed, unresponsive, and brittle (see chap. 4, secs 2.1. & 2.2.).

3.3. Pedagogical implications

Effective, responsible leaders are able to attend to the particularity and singularity of the situation. In other words, it is imperative that leaders (and organisational members) take cognisance of differences and of emerging organisational themes. Given this insight, it is, therefore, disconcerting that the universal and communitarian visions that underwrite many interpretations of the standard normative tale support homogeneous views of ethics. Our teaching strategies should reflect differences of opinion, and encourage tolerance; since, as Morin (1999: 44) argues, 'the worst illusions are found within intolerant, dogmatic, doctrinaire certainties'.

Decontextualised ethical and leadership theories further perpetuate the myth that ethical behaviour and ethical leadership is mostly about individual integrity (Trevino & Brown, 2004: 75). Lissack and Letiche (2002: 88) specifically argue against equating effective, responsible leadership with leadership integrity[107], stating that whereas '[t]raditional organization science is about integrity… there needs to be a new focus on coherence'. They further offer the following comparative analysis between coherence and integrity (87-88):

> Coherence is not integrity. While integrity (seemingly) describes the (possible) characteristics of a closed system, coherence is typical of an open system. Integrity implies stability; coherence implies resilience. Coherence welcomes resonance. Integrity is threatened by it. Integrity stares down emergence, coherence embraces it. Integrity is an application. Coherence is a transient state. Integrity invites judgment and measurement. Coherence can be spoiled by the very act of judging or measuring it.

[107] Lissack and Letiche understand integrity in a more traditional sense, and, therefore, not in the way in which it is employed in this analysis to refer to 'institutions of integrity' and the 'integrity of institutions'.

It is argued that coherence is a function of tolerance and openness, in that tolerance allows us to deal with conflict and dissensus, without losing our mutual sense of purpose. In order to promote tolerance through our teaching practices, it is necessary to draw attention to, what Morin (1999: 49) terms, 'intersubjective understanding'. Morin (50) writes that there are many obstacles to intersubjective understanding, including 'egocentrism, ethnocentrism, [and] sociocentrism' – all of which constitute 'different levels of a common propensity to place oneself at the centre of the world and consider everything that is distant or foreign as secondary, insignificant or hostile'. Those who subscribe to the Cartesian dogma (in which the subject-object dichotomy prevails, and on which the entity perspective of leadership is based) are vulnerable to succumbing to these obstacles. If, however, we teach the importance of coherence and dialogue (and treat these as important elements when dealing with business ethics themes, such as leadership), as well as encourage students to develop the skills needed to imaginatively engage in situations, then the chances of fostering an intersubjective understanding amongst student is greatly enhanced. This is because such an understanding 'demands an open heart, sympathy, [and] generosity' (50). It also demands tolerance and imagination – all of which fosters moral development. In this regard, moral development should be understood in Rorty's (1999: 89) terms as 're-making human selves to enlarge the variety of relationships which constitute those selves'.

In order to promote tolerance, business ethicists should teach not only the importance of intersubjective understanding, but also of self-critique. This is because, in drawing attention to human fallibility, '[c]ritical self-examination helps us decenter ourselves enough to recognize and judge our own egocentrism. Then we don't set ourselves up as judges of all things' (Morin, 1999: 53). In other words, it is through critical self-examination that we come to understand our own weaknesses and failing and, thereby, develop tolerance for other people's weaknesses and failures (53).

Therefore, in order to promote tolerance, business ethicists would do well to take note of the following pointers when developing teaching strategies.

- Morin (1999: 3; 55) writes that '[g]iven the importance of understanding, on all educational levels at all ages, the development of this quality requires a reform of modalities. This should be the task of education for the future.' With regard to this reform of modalities, learning should be focused on discussing and refuting, as opposed to damning and excommunicating (52). In this regard, the art of debate and dialogue should be developed and practiced in the classroom. Further, it should be stressed that understanding 'neither

excuses nor accuses' (52). The difference between constructive criticism and blanket condemnation should be made clear. Emphasis should also be placed on sources and causes of misunderstanding. Students should also be taught the skills necessary to understand across different thought structures, 'which requires the ability to pass through a meta-thought structure that can understand the causes of incomprehension from one to another, and overcome it' (55).

- Morin (52; italicised in original) writes that '[i]f we learn to understand before condemning, we will be on the way to humanizing human relations.' One way in which to develop the ability to understand before condemning is to encourage students to introspect, through (for example) focusing on cases of misconduct, cowardice, peer pressure etc. to which they can relate, and on which they are asked to explicitly reflect. Another way in which to promote sympathy and tolerance is to encourage students to seriously engage with the arts (especially film and literature). This is because, as argued in footnote 93, the arts foster awareness of human complexity (which is necessary for understanding others), and draw attention to the full range of human subjectivity (which is necessary for developing compassion and sympathy) (53).

Note that with regard to the first of these pointers (i.e. developing understanding), deconstruction can serve as a valuable tool. Although a full philosophical course on Derrida and deconstruction will – in most cases – be inappropriate for business students (who do not have a philosophical background), the insights provided by a deconstructive ethics can, nevertheless, be conveyed through creative teaching techniques. When developing such techniques, careful consideration should be taken of various elements of deconstruction. Important in this regard is, firstly, the *function* of the double-movement, which, on the one hand, implies interpreting or commenting on our conceptual schemas; and, on the other hand, intervening in these schemas (Derrida, 1978a; 1988d); secondly, the *goals* of the double movement, namely that it represents an attempt to undermine the stability of our systems of meaning, and thereby shift the limits of our understanding; that it seeks to challenge that which 'is still too homogenous, insufficiently refined or differentiated, or else egalitarian' (Derrida, 2002a: 20); and, that it draws attention to the limitations and provisional status of our models, thereby dispelling the myth of logocentrism; thirdly, the *impetus* of deconstruction, i.e. that it is guided by ethical testimony and the desire to do justice; and, lastly, the *logic* of deconstruction, i.e. that it functions as a recursive modality, and, therefore, cannot be reduced to a dogmatically-applied procedure.

Taking cognisance of these insights whilst teaching business ethics will do much to promote intersubjective understanding, and also provide students with some of the skills necessary to undertake meaningful action amidst the complexities that characterise our immanent, interdependent, and contingent realities. However, it is not only in the organisational context that skills for dealing with complexity have become critical. On a global scale we now face several crises that threaten the future of our planet, that are defined by innumerable complexities, and that require urgent intervention (see chap. 5, sec. 9). In this regard, sustainability and sustainable development have become key themes on the global agenda. In the next section, the implications that a complex view of sustainable development hold for business ethics will be explored.

4. Case three: Ethical strategy development: implications for understanding sustainable development and teaching business ethics

In the King III Report (intro., para. 8.2.), it is stated that:

> S*ustainability* is the primary moral and economic imperative of the 21st century. It is one of the most important sources of both opportunities and risks for business. Nature, society, and business are interconnected in complex ways that should be understood by decision-makers. Most importantly, current incremental changes towards sustainability are not sufficient – we need a fundamental shift in the way companies and directors act and organise themselves.

It is particularly with reference to the 'fundamental shift' that should occur in organisational thinking that this analysis commences. In order to determine what such a fundamental shift might entail, it is useful to firstly reflect upon the traditional understanding of, and approaches to sustainability and sustainable development.

4.1. Defining sustainability

At a very basic level, sustainability is concerned with systems maintenance, which means that our actions should not impact on a system in ways that threaten its long-term viability. In other words, sustainability shows a concern for intergenerational equity, in that present actions should not hamper the ability of future generations to satisfy their needs (Crane & Matten, 2004: 22). Although the term has its roots in environmental management and analysis, the sustainability concept has been extended to include social and economic aspects. The reason for this is that it is impossible to consider environmental sustainability 'without also considering the relevant communities and their

activities' (22). Another reason for the extension of the term is that, if sustainability implies a concern for the equity of future generations, then, logically, it should also imply a concern for current generations (22-23). In taking the above into consideration, Andrew Crane and Dirk Matten (24) offer the following definition of sustainability: 'Sustainability refers to the long-term maintenance of systems according to environmental, economic and social considerations.'

Environmental sustainability concerns 'the effective management of physical resources so that they are conserved for the future' (24). Biosystems and natural resources are finite, and are negatively impacted upon by a number of human activities, including industrialisation, the continued use of non-renewable resources, and the use of damaging environmental pollutants (24). Not only do these activities threaten the sustainability of biosystems, but also pose a threat for economic sustainability.

Economic sustainability 'initially emerged from economic growth models that assessed the limits imposed by the carrying capacity of the earth' (25). This led to a focus on the impact that our activities have on future generations, and an attempt to mitigate this impact. In terms of business ethics, economic sustainability can be narrowly interpreted as a concern for the long-term economic performance of a company, or more broadly interpreted as a 'company's attitude towards and impact upon the economic framework in which it is embedded' (25). The concept of triple bottom line reporting (TBL) (Elkington, 1999) has also enjoyed a lot of attention in business ethics. TBL promotes the idea that business should not only add economic value, but also social and environmental value (Crane & Matten, 2004: 24).

The youngest, but arguably most influential, sustainability development is social sustainability. The debate on social sustainability – which gained prominence in the 1990s – 'marked a significant shift in the way that notions of sustainability were conceptualized' (25). The key issue is this debate is social justice, specifically the implications for justice resulting from income disparities, the gap between richer and poorer countries, and the under-provision and deterioration of basic services in many countries across the world (25-26). Business is increasingly involved in this debate; and, as such, Elkington (interpreted in Crane & Matten, 2004:26) argues that TBL 'is less about establishing accounting techniques and performance metrics... and more about the way that companies think about and act in business.'

4.2. The dominant model of sustainable development

Although sustainability can be interpreted in many different ways, the concept is most commonly employed in relation to sustainable development, which is defined as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Brundtland Report, World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

The three tiers of sustainable development (namely, ecological, economic, and socio-political development) are often thought of, and graphically portrayed, in terms of a Venn diagram (in which the three tiers are represented as three overlapping spheres), or in terms of three pillars standing on the base of technology and governance (Hattingh, 2006: 201; 202). Such representations draw attention to the fact that the three separate tiers of sustainable development are, in fact, interdependent and mutually reinforcing, and must, therefore, be 'integrated' with one another (203). This view of sustainable development corresponds closely with Elkington's (1999) idea of the TBL.

Despite drawing attention to the interdependence, mutual reinforcement, and interaction between these tiers, Johan Hattingh (2006: 203) argues that such representations serve to reinforce (rather than undermine) the notion that the three tiers of sustainable development are *external to one another* and function according to their own rules (see Zadek, 2003). Given this interpretation, the main goal of sustainable development is to find the right balance or optimal trade-off between these three tiers. However, since there is no *a priori* viewpoint on which one can draw, determining the correct balance often ends up being 'a function of the set of values that is given priority by policy- and decision-makers' (Hattingh, 2006: 205). Given the fact that we live in an anthropocentric society, the set of values that is usually accorded priority 'is that of social justice and human development' (205). This is also reinforced in the Brundtland Report (in Hattingh, 2006: 200), in which the needs of the poor are defined as central to the notion of sustainable development.

In the Brundtland Report (in Hattingh, 2006: 200) the 'state of technology and the social organization in society' is seen as the only constraint on sustainable development. This view is characteristic of the default position on sustainable development, which is defined by *managerial optimism*. Hattingh (2006: 206) defines managerial optimism as the belief that 'we possess the knowledge and technical know-how to manage all environmental risks, provided... that the benefits of mitigation outweigh the costs involved.' Taken to its logical conclusion, this means that nothing in nature should – in principle – be left intact if we humans can benefit from it, and mitigate our

impact on it (206). This conclusion reinforces the assumptions that *resources are infinitely interchangeable* (i.e. all aspects of nature can, in principle, 'be 'traded in' for some kind of human benefit' (207)), and that environmental protection is only warranted if it leads to social development (i.e. the environment is a *means to human ends*) (207-208).

Hattingh (203-209) is very critical of the assumptions upon which the dominant model of sustainable development is based. Specifically, he argues that, if the three tiers of sustainable development are essentially seen as external to one another, then environmental protection runs the very real risk of being construed as an 'add on' or 'a nice to have'. The problem is that we simply do not know how nature functions, or how our actions impact on it. Unfettered managerial optimism can, therefore, potentially lead to detrimental outcomes. Furthermore, if we do not know precisely how nature functions, then we cannot simply assume that resources are infinitely interchangeable. Trade-offs often entail irreversible processes, the effects of which are exacerbated by the fact that we do not have an unlimited supply of natural capital to begin with. Lastly, the instrumental rationality upon which the dominant conception of sustainable development is based, assumes that only humans have intrinsic value, meaning that sustainable development operates only in the service of mankind. These implications lead Hattingh (204; my italics) to conclude that, instead of working with a view of sustainable development in which the environment is always accorded third place,

> a far more accurate but also far more complex portrayal of sustainable development would be one in which these three spheres were conceptualised as *embedded* within one another, with values that are internally linked to one another and a logic that inseparably intertwines them.

4.3. Towards a complex model of sustainable development

Hattingh (211) argues that conceptualising sustainable development in terms of embedded spheres locks us in the language of impact prevention rather than mere mitigation (as is the case in the traditional models of sustainable development). Furthermore, he argues that this alternative portrayal of sustainable development necessitates a complex language, since – given this portrayal – we are forced to concede to the fact that we have incomplete knowledge regarding the impact of our actions. This raises a number of difficult questions, including:

> How does one evaluate a sustainable practice? What are the time-scales involved? Are there measures for sustainability and if so, to whose benefit are they applied? Will what seems to be a sustainable strategy now actually prove to be so in the future? (Cilliers, 2008: 40).

Although none of these questions have certain answers (see chap. 5, sec. 9), Cilliers (40) argues that a first important step to assuming our responsibilities is to recognise the impossibility of cleanly separately the 'human and the scientific, or the social and the biological'. The goal should be 'to think on both fronts simultaneously' (40). Morin (1999: 8) concurs with this point arguing that, instead of supporting paradigms that either prescribe disjuncture between man and nature (thereby excluding man from the idea of nature), or that reduce man to nature (in which case man is merely thought of in terms of his human nature), it is important to consider both 'implication and separation in the relation between man and nature' (see chap. 3, sec. 4.3.). Morin (8) further argues that '[o]nly a complex paradigm of implication/distinction/conjunction would allow such a conception.'

The difficulties inherent to thinking about sustainability are compounded by globalisation, which necessitates that our actions be evaluated on a planetary scale. The complexity generated by countless bits of information about the world, means that 'the more we are grasped by the world the more difficult it is for us to grasp it' (31). It is precisely this complexity that makes us long for the possibility of isolating a vital problem that would help us in resolving all our other problems (31). Unfortunately, no one vital problem exists, because, as Morin (31) explains, '[t]he planetary problem is a whole fed by multiple, conflictual, crisical [*crisique*] ingredients; it encompasses, surpasses, and feeds them in return.' Here again we see the importance of moral imagination. Only in striving to embody the ideal of fullness, will we become cognisant of the complexities which define our realities. We cannot fully understand these complexities, but we can try to imagine what they might entail; and, through this process, try to develop strategies and interventions that may help us in addressing the problems that arise from these complexities (see chap. 6, sec. 4.4.). Imagination is thus critical to reforming thought in such a way as to allow us to conceive of the world in terms of 'its globality, the whole-part relation, the multidimensionality, the complexity' (31).

Acknowledging the complexities of the world also necessitates that we assume a critical attitude, that we continually reflect on our positions and strategies, and that we confront the uncertainties of our actions. In chapter six (sec. 4.3.), strategy was defined as 'the art of working with uncertainty' and strategy of action as 'the art of acting in uncertainty' (Morin, 2008: 96). Although concepts

such as 'strategy' and '*bricolage*' focus attention on the inherent normativity of our models and the wager involved in the moment of the decision, such concepts also represent a way in which to lessen the complexity through taking action (even though every concrete decision and strategy is inherently characterised by risk and hazard). Strategy is the opposite of clear-cut plans or programmes. However, conceding to the complexity and uncertainty that define the heart of strategy is not paralysing, but rather opens up the possibility to a better future – both for us, and for future generations.

Indeed, one could argue that not facing up to the uncertainty of action represents an unethical and reckless attitude. In chapter five (sec. 6.3.), Derrida (1999: 68) was cited as stating that 'if we assume that Hamlet is a figure of paralysis or neurosis because of undecidability, he might also be a paradigm for action: he understands what actions should be and he undergoes the process of undecidability at the beginning.' Reacting to the sustainability crisis with optimism or technocratic thinking disregards the fact that we are currently facing a number of undecidable questions (von Foerster, 1990) with uncertain outcomes. Such techno-optimists tend to avert their eyes when faced with the unnameable prospects that our actions hold for the future, and refuse to acknowledge that the product of our deliberations is both a baby and a monster, or the unknown for which we have not accounted in our deliberations (Derrida, 1978a: 293; see chap. 4, sec. 4.1.).

Only once we concede to the uncertainties and the complexities involved in strategy development, will we be able to assume a position and take action, whilst always remaining aware of the fact that our best efforts might 'fly back at our heads like a boomerang' (Morin, 2008: 55). Being critical of our interventions at all times will allow us to undertake corrective actions and modify our strategies as we go along, in an attempt to light the way forward (see chap. 6, secs 4.1. & 4.2.2.). In this regard, we must practice the infinite vigilance required of responsible deliberation, whilst simultaneously engaging in the urgency of the situation. This is because we cannot postpone action – as Derrida (2002a: 25) says: we must 'do something, even if it's imperfect' (see chap. 5, sec. 7.2.).

4.4. Pedagogical implications

In terms of business ethics education, the above analysis implies that we should forsake teaching strategies that are centred on applying categorically-binding formulae or instrumental proceduralism. Such strategies merely reinforce the mistaken notion that we can 'calculate' our way out of the problems with which we are confronted today. Rather, it should be stressed that,

although calculations and programmes are important – indeed Morin (1999: 47) argues that '[w]e can use short program sequences within our strategies' – they cannot replace independent ethical thought, decision-making, and critical reflection. This is because these skills are vital in developing robust strategies with which we can tackle the problems that we are currently facing.

Part of successful strategy development (particularly in the context of sustainability) requires that we rethink our understanding of development. All-too-often, development is conceived exclusively as techno-economic progress (which is usually not sustainable in the long-term). In order to work towards sustainable strategies, Morin (34) argues that we need 'a more rich and complex notion of development which is not only material but also intellectual, emotional, moral…' Playing in the park 'with big business and grand politics' (Cilliers, 2008: 54), or blinding endorsing a scientific rationality will not solve our ethical dilemmas. Instead, we need to acknowledge the complexities associated with sustainable development, as this will 'help us to humanise science' (54). Companies should be seen as essential to this process. As such, their responsibilities should not be articulated in semantics that calls for 'sacrifices' or the 'taming of capitalism' (as is often the case in the governance literature). Such language frames companies as opponents, rather than partners in working towards a sustainable future (Homann, 2007: 5). As Homann (7) states: 'Corporations cannot be expected to make 'sacrifices,' but they can *invest* – in real or human capital, but also in the social order as a prerequisite of long-run benefit.'

Humanising science is extremely important because, as Morin (1999: 38) explains, we – as humans – 'all share a common genetic, cerebral, emotional identity' which transcends 'our individual, cultural and social diversities.' We also now face the same life and death problems in that we are all 'connected in the same planetary community, sharing a common fate'[108] (38). This means that, when thinking on sustainable development, we must take cognisance of the fact that 'all truly human development means joint development of individual autonomies, community participations, and a sense of belonging to the human species' (25). This requires a fundamental mind-shift in terms of how business is done, as well as the purpose of business. Homann (2007: 5) argues that corporate governance will only be successful if companies bear the responsibility for governance collectively. Currently, there is still little coordination between companies; and, according to Homann (5), a key reason for this is that corporations are not 'used to cooperating with other corporations in the area of global politics – in mutual interests – while remaining rivals in markets.' Therefore, it is only in focusing on joint development and our common human future that it

[108] Note that, in speaking of our commonalities, Morin (1999) is arguing on the material level, as opposed to on the ideological level (which is appealed to by De George (2008) in his analysis of morality).

becomes possible to change the mindset of companies, who still see themselves as operating in isolation to one another, and in isolation to the human community. One way in which to promote the focus on joint development is to draw attention to the embedded and inter-related nature of our identities and realities.

As stated earlier, the King III Report (intro., para. 8.2.) calls for 'a fundamental shift in the way companies and directors act and organise themselves'. As business ethicists, it is part of our responsibility to promote thinking that will facilitate such a fundamental shift. However, it is also part of our responsibility to equip students with the conceptual tools needs to deal with change. Morin (1999: 42) writes that '[a]ll development is the fruit of successful deviation that flourishes, and changes the system within which it arose; it disorganizes the system in reorganizing it.' Development, therefore, implies change and uncertainty. One of the major problems with the dominant notion of sustainable development (described earlier in the analysis), is the fact that it is based on the illusion that we can predict the course of human events. However, as soon as the myth of Progress collapses, it brings with it an awareness of historic uncertainty (41). Although some progress is, of course, possible, it always remains uncertain; and, this 'is compounded by uncertainties related to the speed and acceleration in our planetary era of complex random process that no human mind or supercomputer or Laplace demon could encompass' (41). As business ethicists, we should take cognisance of this reality and stop propagating acontextual, universal theories, and rather favour teaching strategies that are sensitive to the contingencies and complexities with which we are faced. In this regard, it is again useful to consider the function, goals, motivation, and logic of a deconstructive ethics, summarised in section 3.3. This is because the insights derived from a deconstructive ethics can help us to remain vigilant of the strategies that we employ, and to modify and transform these strategies when necessary.

Given the above analysis, one can conclude that successful, ethical, and sustainable strategy development is contingent on the following three dimensions, which must be incorporated in education for the future:

- An awareness of the fact that 'the human genre is now situated on a planetary scale' and that 'recognition of our earth citizenship [is] indispensible for all of us' (Morin, 1999: 2). This point is particularly poignant, given the fact that planetary developments will continue to accelerate during the 21st century (2).
- A focus on the complex configuration of the planetary crisis, so as to 'show how all human beings now face the same life and death problems and share the same fate' (2).

- Learning that helps us to acknowledge and confront the uncertainties of knowledge, particularly since we 'live in a changing epoch where… everything is interconnected' (44-45).

It is this last case on sustainable development that most forcefully draws attention to the importance of developing strategies for dealing with the complexities of our world. Understanding the paradigm of critical complexity is essential in developing new ways for thinking about our problems. However, supplementing this paradigm with more specific tools (such as deconstruction) is also vital in developing the skills necessary to critique, intervene, and develop robust strategies. In a nutshell, education for the future (including the future of business ethics) must promote an understanding of our complex realities, and equip students with the skills necessary to deal with these complexities.

5. Conclusion

In reflecting on what it means to teach business ethics, one has to concede that, in one respect, business ethicists are doomed to teach a general morality. This is due to the fact that ethics becomes institutionalised through teaching and professional practices. However, this is not a worthless exercise: it is important to remember that ethics needs morality in the same way that justice needs the law; and, that ethics should guide morality (just as justice should guide the law). In other words, history is important as it provides us with moral precedents and programmes. The critical task for business ethicists in this regard is to make choices with regard to *what* precedents are taught.

Throughout this study, it has been argued that business ethicists should reject acontextual, universal moral theories, in favour of theories that focus on the complexities of human nature, and that draw attention to the fact that learning is itself vulnerable to error and illusion (Morin, 1999: 5). As such, the type of theories that we teach should emphasise the importance of, what Morin (7) terms, the 'principle of rational uncertainty' i.e. 'that if rationality does not maintain vigilance it can turn into rationalizing illusion.' Our theories should, therefore, serve to draw attention to the nature of rationality, which 'is not only theoretical, not only critical, but also self-critical' (8). Inherent to this view of rationality is the insight that ethical action cannot be reduced to moral law. Engaging with complexity does not lead to the rejection of 'clarity, order or determinism', but to the knowledge that 'we cannot program discovery, knowledge, or action' (Morin, 2008: 56). Therefore, in another respect, if business ethicists take cognisance of a complex notion of ethics, they can move far beyond teaching a general morality. This can be achieved by developing teaching strategies that

sensitise students to the complexities of our world, and equip them with the skills necessary to deal with these complexities.

For too long, business ethicists have been bathing complacently in the light of clarity and order provided by the history of moral thought. This fact constitutes a very prominent reason for why business ethics has had such a limited impact on the business world: business ethicists have mainly looked backwards, not forwards. Morin (2008: 98) argues that:

> We stand on the threshold of a new beginning. We are not in the last stages of the history of thinking, nor have we reached the limits of the human spirit. We are, rather, still in its prehistory… We are in an initial period where it is necessary to recalibrate our perspectives on knowledge and politics… And here… we must learn to work with chance and uncertainty.

In this chapter, the complex perspective on ethical knowledge developed in this study was elucidated in terms of the challenges that such a perspective holds for our traditional understanding of the notions of corporate social responsibility, leadership, and sustainability; as well as in terms of the implications that it holds for teaching business ethics. Although the analysis was presented as three separate cases, all three cases dealt with the uncertainties that arise from our limited knowledge of the complex phenomena that characterise our realities. A central message from these cases is that we must abandon programmes and solutions that have worked in the past, and develop new strategies for the future.

In the introduction to this chapter, the question of whether business ethics can be a viable enterprise was raised. At this stage, it should be clear that the important question is not whether business ethics is viable, but rather how we – as business ethicists – can ensure its viability. This is the ever-renewed challenge with which we are faced.

Conclusion

1. Summary of the argument

The study commenced with a description and critical evaluation of the theories that constitute the standard normative tale commonly taught in business ethics. The universal or communitarian notions of the good that underlie this tale were challenged at the hand of an affirmative view of postmodernism. Specifically, the implications that arise from a robust engagement with the realities of our age (including the crisis of representation, the provisionality of meaning, reflexivity, and the decentering of the subject) were addressed.

Although postmodernism served as a useful starting point for challenging the standard normative tale, the study moved beyond postmodernism, in exploring the insights gleaned from critical complexity theory (and its roots) and deconstruction. The ethical challenges that these theories hold for understanding business ethics were explicated through means of a close reading of a critical text on the relevance of Derrida for understanding the nature of corporate social responsibility. The outcome of this analysis was to draw attention to why it is necessary to rethink the normative basis of business ethics.

After having presented and evaluated the merits of various theories, the insights gleaned in the analysis were used to elaborate on the characteristics of a complex ethics. This was done in an attempt to provide some substantive suggestions as to how one is to conceptualise of a complex ethics. Lastly, the challenge that a complex ethics poses to understanding and teaching prominent business ethics themes was illustrated, so as to show the potential that a complex set of ideas holds for the field of business ethics.

Key ideas and insights

In the introduction to this study it was stated that this work is dedicated to critically exploring the ideas behind various theories, in order to discover the potential that they hold for ethics generally, and business ethics specifically. An underlying and central concern that informed this analysis throughout was whether the process of engaging with ideas reflected integrity. In order to show integrity in one's engagement with ideas, one must be aware of the power of ideas. Morin (1999: 10) explains that 'beliefs and ideas are not only products of the mind, they are also states of mind that have life and power. That is why they can possess us.' Furthermore, as cited in the introduction,

Keynes (1953) argues that ideas are dangerous for good and evil. As such, we cannot make good use of ideas, unless we are willing to engage in dialogue with our ideas (which allows us to 'control them as much as they control us, and submit then to tests of truth and error' (Morin, 1999: 10)). In order to ensure the integrity of our theoretical positions, we need to acknowledge the paradoxical status of our ideas, which amounts to the fact that we can only perceive the shortcomings of ideas through entering into conversation with ideas (11).

In this study, the shortcomings of the theories that comprise the normative basis of business ethics were, in part, elucidated by drawing on ideas from affirmative postmodernism, complexity theory, and deconstruction. The central difference between the standard normative tale and these latter ideas can be summarised as follows: on the one hand, the standard normative tale is largely prescriptive and aimed at determining the heart of morality (either by providing substantive claims as concerns the nature of the good, or through determining the procedural steps that will lead to the 'right' answer). On the other hand, affirmative postmodernism in general, and complexity theory and deconstruction in particular, are premised on positions that are sensitive to both the complex contingencies that impact on our idea of the good, and the peripheral veins that feed and sustain the beating heart of The Good. In showing that the concept of The Good is neither self-sustaining nor a natural given, theories such as deconstruction offer a challenge to universal or communitarian views of morality, which – when put into practice – turn our moral responsibilities into duties and rules. It was further shown that what is put forward as the greatest strength of the standard normative tale i.e. that ethical rules and principles can provide unambiguous solutions to moral problems, is in actual fact the greatest weakness. This is because, in an applied (business ethics) context these tools and instruments may limit and undermine the capacity or inclination of moral agents to appreciate and wrestle with ethical problems.

A central insight of this analysis is that ethical problems are not limited to considerations of first-order normative principles. The analysis of affirmative postmodernism showed that the rigid distinction between the normative and descriptive categories – or between what ought to be the case and what is the case – that defines the field(s) of business ethics is untenable. This is because, following the insights gleaned from postmodernism, our normative categories cannot be viewed in abstract terms but must be considered within specific practices and language games; and, conversely, our specific descriptions of our world and our practices do not correspond with an *a priori* view of reality, but involve certain choices and normative judgements. The imbrication of the normative and the descriptive categories poses a huge challenge to our understanding of ethics, since we can no longer appeal either to a transcendental ideal realm, or to an objective reality (as is

done in the functionalist paradigm) when justifying our ethical positions. In other words, *the imbrication of ethics with the world introduces complexity.*

In this regard, the analysis of the paradigm of complexity presented in the study offers important insights for dealing with this postmodern re-description of ethics. From a complexity perspective, our identities are viewed as emergent and relationally-constituted constructs, rather than natural pre-given phenomena. The question of what it means to be human cannot, therefore, be divorced from an understanding of our immanent and embedded positions in the world. Complexity theory further helps us to understand ourselves as component parts in the system, and for envisioning the potential consequences that our actions hold for other components in the system, and for the system as such.

With regard to ethics, complexity theory provides the backdrop against which we can think through both the status of our ethical models, and the consequences of our actions. In terms of their status, our ethical models are the products of our choices and decisions, and are, therefore, necessarily limited, exclusionary, and characterised by some performative tension. In terms of consequences, complexity theory draws attention to the fact that it is impossible to fully predict the effects of our decisions (due to non-linearity); yet, because our decisions and actions have very real effects on ourselves and on others, we, nevertheless, remain responsible for them. *Complexity theory, therefore, highlights the fact that we are always in trouble, and that we need to continually and critically reflect on our practices and strategies.*

What should be clear from the analysis of complexity theory is that, in its traditional understanding, ethics (as corresponding with some transcendental realm) remains inaccessible to us. In Wittgenstein's terminology: the outside is the silence that delimits the world, and since ethics belongs to this outside, we cannot articulate ethics. On Wittgenstein's, Luhmann's, and von Foerster's view, all knowledge (including ethical knowledge) is the outcome of reflexive processes. Ethics can no longer be determined in terms of right and wrong, good and bad, and what deserves respect and what does not, but can only be evaluated in terms of the pragmatically-determined standards of our practices and language games. A problem that, however, arises when we view complex systems as informationally-closed is that our language games and practices can bear solipsistic or relativist implications. In other words, if the ethical task is viewed only in terms of producing thicker descriptions of our practices and language games, we risk developing a relativist or incommensurable view of ethics. For this reason, we cannot completely forego the normative dimension. The question, however, is whether one can introduce the normative dimension without reinstating metaphysical assumptions. In this regard, Derrida's deconstructive ethics offers a way

forward, in that he develops a philosophical position which attempts to find a breach in operationally-closed systems. In other words, *Derrida's philosophy addresses the methodological complexity of thinking together a system and its environment.*

Derrida is fully aware of the fact that we function as operationally-closed systems. In this regard, one need only consider his remarks regarding text and context: Derrida states that there is no outside (con)text (which is an ontological point) and that there is nothing outside of the (con)text (which is an epistemological point). Despite this, Derrida nevertheless, attempts to develop a strong challenge to our contextually-defined practices through deconstruction. Deconstruction implies a serious engagement in our practices in order to destabilise these practices. This is done through revealing the metaphysical idealisations that are smuggled into our conceptual schemas, and denaturalising these positions by drawing attention to the supplementary complications, and the play of *différance* that pervades all meaning. In so doing, Derrida opens the door to otherness, difference, and a conception of ethics that is not premised on the commonalities of our experiences.

Furthermore, deconstruction operates in service of the singularity of the event, which Derrida defines as the moment of (im)possibility. Of this, he writes: 'deconstruction [is]... put forward *in the name of the* real' where the real is understood as a promise, or 'as the coming or event of the other, where the other resists all reappropriation' (Derrida, 2002b: 367). Deconstruction is, therefore, a means of trying to think through the complexity that precedes the reductive implications introduced by modelling. This is of course impossible since we cannot understand phenomena in terms of their full complexity. However, in positing the ideal of human fullness, Derrida, nevertheless, reintroduces a regulative ideal (expressed in limit or quasi-concepts such as the gift, justice, hospitality, etc.) against which we can judge the ethics of our practices, whilst still remaining firmly focused on the unique context in which the moment of the event materialises. Deconstruction is, therefore, a means by which to articulate the ethical interruption of ontological closure which saves us from ethical solipsism and enables us to practice an ethics that simultaneously focuses on the normative and the descriptive dimensions, by allowing for the manifestation of justice in the singularity of the event.

Ethical testimony is the impetus of deconstruction, and in this regard one can argue that deconstruction is nothing other than a means of engaging with the inevitable normativity generated by complexity. Therefore, in a nutshell, understanding the paradigm of critical complexity is essential in developing new ways for thinking about our ethical problems. However, we must, as Allen (2000: 10) states, also 'put in place the mechanisms that allow us always to question our

"knowledge" and continue exploring.' In this regard, deconstruction is vital in helping us to develop the skills necessary to critique, intervene, and develop robust strategies. Furthermore, in addressing the ethical-political implications that arise due to the limitations of our knowledge, Derrida's philosophy presents a way in which to pull the insights gleaned from complexity theory into the human domain. As such, it is argued that *deconstruction provides us with a non-trivial productive reading of a complex notion of ethics.*

In summary, in contrast to the ideological positions espoused in the standard normative tale, this study draws attention to the idea that our choices and decisions should be viewed as strategies for living, rather than programmes or blueprints that correspond with some predetermined, ideal realm. Furthermore, it is only in recognising the nature and status of our strategies that we can develop the robustness and resilience needed to successfully deal with our complex environments – including our business environment. The above argument also reaffirms the point that complex positions cannot provide 'The Answer'. In fact, when uncritically and dogmatically applied (as is often the case), the ideas of complexity theory and deconstruction can also become dangerous. A further condition for showing integrity when engaging with ideas, therefore, concerns the manner in which we put our ideas to work. Morin (1999: 11) writes that '[a]n idea or a theory should not be purely and simply instrumentalized, nor should it tyrannically impose its verdicts'. Rather, 'it should assist and orientate the cognitive strategies adopted by human subjects.' In this regard, this study hopefully demonstrates that – when honestly applied – complexity theory and deconstruction open us up to the multidimensionality of thought, and help us to navigate our way through this multidimensionality.

2. Applied ethics: viewing ideas as tools

It was further stated in the introduction that the goal of business ethics should be to provide students and practitioners with sense-making tools and tools of analysis that can aid in ethical decision-making in the workplace. If we cannot keep the descriptive and normative categories apart, then the traditional understanding of 'tool' – as something which interfaces between the cognitive domain and objective reality – is subject to a deconstruction of sorts, in that the term is opened up to include not only analytical tools, but any strategy or knowledge that helps us to navigate our way through the complexities of our realities. In the business context, qualitative tools such as organisational narratives, workplace jokes and humour, budgets, memos, and newsletters can assist one in tapping into the complex network of tacit beliefs that inform corporate behaviour and identity (Painter-

Morland, 2008: 244). These are, however, very specific tools. More generally (and as argued in this study), theoretical knowledge can also serve as a valuable tool.

In this regard, it is worthwhile to take note of Lissack and Letiche's (2002: 89) analysis of the similarities between physical tools and knowledge. Firstly, both tools and knowledge can only be understood through use, and using them modifies the user's perspective on the world. Secondly, learning how to use tools and knowledge involves a great deal more than can be captured in explicit rules. And, thirdly, the occasions and conditions for use emerge from, and are framed within a specific context. What this analogy implies is that, in order for our knowledge and ideas to be useful, they need to be put to use – in other words, they need to be applied in ways that transform our thoughts and our practices.

Many business ethicists feel that complex conceptions of ethics (which are critical, provisional, and transgressive in nature) won't find footing in the 'real world', since such theories cannot provide ready solutions to the problems experienced by businessmen. However, using Lissack and Letiche's analogy, one can argue that just as tools assist us in solving our problems, so too do ideas. Despite being crucial to the activity at hand, a paintbrush cannot give us a painting anymore than a violin can give us music. Rather, these tools are only of value if used by someone with the requisite skills, knowledge, and imagination. The same applies to our theories. It cannot be denied that complexity theory demands more from the user than do ethical theories that provide 'moral recipes' for attaining the good life. However, in this study it was shown that notions of ethics that are justified either in terms of transcendental ideals or the functionalist paradigm are often not practically very useful, since they are premised on moral free will and an objective, stable view of the world respectively. Neither of these premises holds, given the complexities of the world. Successfully engaging with moral problems requires skills such as critical self-reflection, moral imagination, a serious engagement with the arts, an ability to view the interdependent relations between parts and whole, an ability to understand subjects within their contexts, an ability to engage in dialogue and foster normative congruence, an ability to think through the challenges of globalisation etc. Furthermore, complexity implies an engagement with contingency, and for this reason a complex view of ethics can never prescribe to us how we should act as each situation calls for fresh judgement.

Perhaps one of the biggest problems is that it is often assumed by business ethicists and practitioners alike, that being ethical should be easy: once people are motivated to make ethical choices, the ethicist's work is complete as good consequences will necessarily follow. This analysis

has shown that this view, unfortunately, does not represent a realistic take on the nature of ethical actions. As Bauman (1993) says, conceding to the complexities is unlikely to make life any easier. The best we can hope for is that by putting these ideas to work, we may make life a little more moral.

The above argument begs the question of whether deconstruction and critical complexity theory are the *only* tools that help us to successfully live up to our responsibilities (particularly since this analysis puts into question the usefulness of applying the standard normative tale). In staying with the analogy between tools and knowledge, one can argue that beautiful paintings (for example) need not be created with paintbrushes – sponges, or even fingers, can serve as adequate replacements. The same holds true in the case of our ideas: alternative ideas may prove just as useful for achieving our ends. Although, deconstruction and critical complexity theory were employed in order to introduce a complex understanding of ethics and business ethics, other critical and reflexive theories and ideas could have possibly led to many of the same insights that emerged from this study. Therefore, not only do deconstruction and complexity theory not provide us with 'The Answer', but they also cannot exclusively determine 'The Way'.

In order to be consistent with the position developed in this study, one has to concede to the possibility that other theories may be just as appropriate, or even more appropriate, in making an argument for a complex ethics. In this regard, one could claim that the choice of theories presented here is quite arbitrary. However, such an argument stems from a position akin to that of sceptical postmodernism. A better alternative is to follow a productive, affirmative, and more robust line of reasoning, and instead argue that – despite conceding to the applicability of utilising alternative theories – what is of greater importance is whether our chosen theories prove useful, and whether we employ these theories with integrity (i.e. that we show a willingness to engage with our ideas, and submit them to tests of truth and error). In thus regard, it is important to display an attitude of critical self-reflexivity at all times, in order to prevent our ideas from controlling us.

We will only be able to successfully challenge our ideas if we understand these ideas, as well as the potential power that they hold for our practices. Therefore, to reiterate, a certain level of competence is needed on the part of the practitioner. To see why this is the case, one need only consider the damage done by the jargon-filled and confusing positions espoused by certain avowed 'deconstructionists'. This point can also be made by once more turning to the analogy between tools and knowledge: although the sounds of the violin (for example) can be beautiful, in the wrong hands the violin emits a terrible, screeching noise. Similarly, our theories and ideas need to be

appropriate to the relevant contexts in which they are employed. Just like an amateur musician is likely to create a more pleasant sound by strumming a few, simple guitar chords than by attempting a sophisticated piece on the violin; so too, one may achieve greater success with business ethics students without making explicit mention of deconstruction and critical complexity theory – particularly because many of these students do not have any formal training in philosophy.

A fallacy which is often made by academics is that one can *only* speak of complex phenomena in a complex language. Although one must be mindful of the simplifying effects that can be created by language (see chap. 5, sec. 2.1.), it is possible to convey the insights that emerge from this analysis in other ways. As argued in the previous chapter (sec. 3.3.), taking cognisance of the function, goals, impetus and logic of deconstruction (for example) can help us to develop appropriate teaching strategies for equipping students with the skills necessary to deal with the challenges and the opportunities that present themselves in our rapidly-changing and complex world. Therefore, in certain contexts, we might have to modify our theoretical tools, in order to make them appropriate for a given audience. This is an enormous challenge for ethicists, as such modifications should present a translation of complexity ideas into an appropriate 'language' for students, whilst avoiding a dumbing down of these ideas (as this will reaffirm the illusion that it is easy to be ethical). Otherwise put: whilst our teaching strategies should be tailored to our circumstances, we should also be careful not to compromise on the integrity of the ideas with which we are working.

3. Future challenges

In this study, a number of ideas were explored in order to unlock the potential that they hold for our practices, specifically our business practices. Since there can be no radical distinction between ivory tower ethics and boardroom ethics, our ideas have the power to transform our practices, but our practices can modify and shape our ideas. What is of crucial importance in this regard is that we become competent and critical readers of texts and contexts, in order to make certain that our ideas reflect integrity. The significance of this task is further illustrated in the following statement by Morin (1999:38): 'The worst dangers and the greatest hopes are borne by the same function: the human mind itself.'

Today, more than ever before, the business domain provides the forum in which human minds exercise their power. As such, it is imperative that business practitioners and leaders take cognisance of, and learn to successfully deal with, the complexities that characterise our age. This will only happen if we work towards realising the epistemological revolution of which Morin

speaks, and nurture the multidimensionality of thought needed to develop sustainable strategies. In this regard, the analysis presented in this study constitutes a meta-position that one can call upon in ethical decision-making and strategy development, since such a position shows us what type of considerations must be kept in mind when engaging in the particularities of complex situations.

At stake is not only the viability of business ethics (as a subject which can potentially make a worthwhile contribution to the practice of business), but the viability of our collective future. As such, further research should be undertaken in order to develop the ideas presented in this study. In terms of business ethics, we need to determine the exact challenge that a complex notion of ethics poses for prominent business ethics themes besides those analysed in chapter seven. Furthermore, research should also be undertaken in order to unpack specific teaching strategies that would equip students with the sense-making tools and tools of analysis necessary to reflect on the moral dimension of business problems in their particular contexts. In terms of philosophy, we need to further develop our understanding of ethical complexity. As argued in the previous section, deconstruction is not the only critical, reflexive, and complex philosophical position. Therefore, one way in which to contribute to the debate is to explore other philosophical positions, as different positions may reveal different aspects of ethical complexity, all of which can help us to understand what it means to be human.

The future is not certain and clinging to theories that pretend otherwise is extremely dangerous, as they provide us with a false sense of comfort. There is no relief from the enormous task that lies ahead of us: the only hope for the future is to concede to the complex nature of the multiple crises that we face today, and to act both vigilantly and urgently.

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